CONVERSATION STARTERS

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

HARPER LEE

by dailyBooks

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Conversation Starters

for

Harper Lee’s

To Kill a Mockingbird

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Please Note: This is an unofficial conversation starters guide. If you have not yet read the original work, please do so first.

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Tips for Using dailyBooks Conversation Starters:

EVERY GOOD BOOK CONTAINS A WORLD FAR DEEPER THAN the surface of its pages. The characters and their world come alive through the words on the pages, yet the characters and its world still live on. Questions herein are designed to bring us beneath the surface of the page and invite us into the world that lives on. These questions can be used to:

Foster a deeper understanding of the book

Promote an atmosphere of discussion for groups

Assist in the study of the book, either individually or corporately

Explore unseen realms of the book as never seen before

About Us:

THROUGH YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AND FIELD EXPERTISE, from newspaper featured book clubs to local library chapters, dailyBooks can bring your book discussion to life. Host your book party as we discuss some of today's most widely read books.

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Introducing To Kill a Mockingbird

THE STORY IS SET IN THE FICTIONAL CITY OF MAYCOMB, Alabama, and revolves around a young girl named Scout. Scout spends her time going to school and playing with her brother and friend, who visits Maycomb every summer to spend the holidays with his aunt. Their favorite pastime is to wonder about a reclusive neighbor, Boo Radley, who is an enigma to them, especially given that no one is willing to talk to them about the man. They allow their imaginations to run wild about Boo.

In the midst of this innocent play-acting, the world is burning. Race suddenly becomes an ugly word in Maycomb when a young carpenter named Tom Robinson becomes accused of raping Mayella Ewell, a young white girl. Mayella does not have much of a life and is abused by her father, Bob Ewell, while having to look after the household. She tries to seduce Robinson, but when her father catches her, he files a complaint against the black man. Atticus Finch steps in and agrees to defend the man, claiming that he deserves a proper representation. In spite of his best efforts, Robinson is convicted. Finch wants to file an appeal, but before he can do anything, Robinson tries to escape and is gunned down.

During the trial, the Finch family become pariahs in Maycomb. Even family members are not happy with Finch’s decision to defend a black man. Though Finch loses the case, he destroys Ewell’s credibility and humiliates him in court. In response, Ewell tries to harm Scout and Jem, who are then saved by the reclusive neighbor, Boo Radley. The entire trial and its aftermath leave Scout more aware of reality, firmly ending the innocence of her childhood.

Another thread running through the book is Aunt Alexandra’s disapproval of her brother and the way he runs his family. She dislikes the fact that the children have Calpurnia as a mother figure and that Scout is allowed to run around the place doing what she pleases. The disagreements between Scout and her aunt bring to light the sexism of the times when young girls were not allowed to have the same fun as young boys.

Introducing the Author

HARPER LEE IS AN AMERICAN AUTHOR WHO HAD ONLY written one book, To Kill a Mockingbird, until her recently published book, Go Set a Watchman. She won the Pulitzer Prize and a plethora of medals and accolades for To Kill a Mockingbird, which was published just before the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and became very relevant. Today, this book is considered a classic of American literature and continues to be taught in schools throughout the United States.

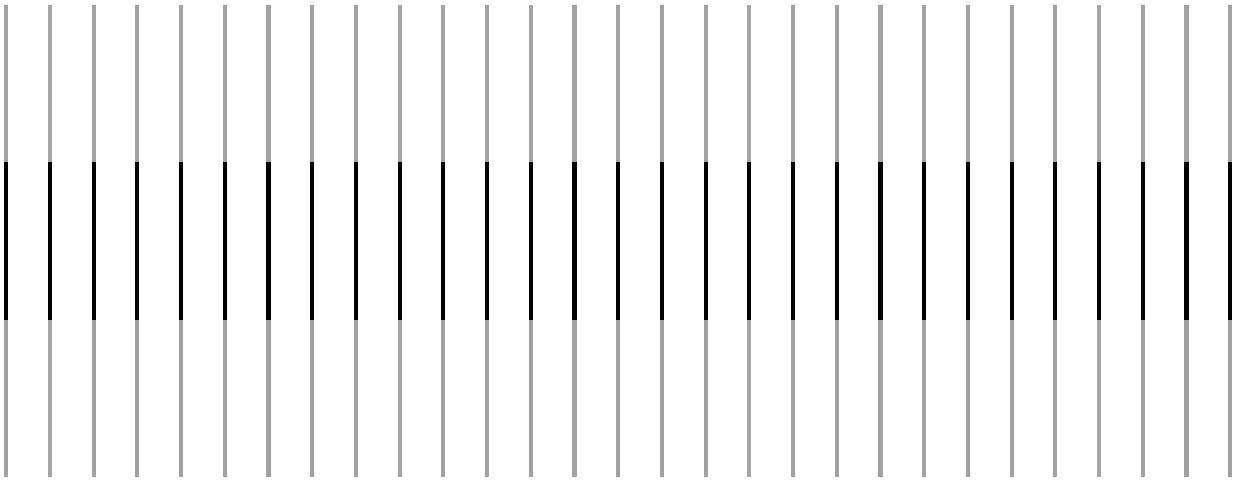
Born in April 1926, in Alabama, Harper Lee's given name was Nelle Lee, a name that was given to her in honor of her grandmother, Ellen. Her father was a lawyer, and her mother was a housewife. She completed her schooling at Monroe County High School, and then attended Huntingdon College. Additionally, she pursued studying for a law degree but decided to pursue other options.

Lee moved to New York in 1949 and got a job as an airline clerk; she started to write in her spare time. Her friends, Michael Brown and Joy Williams, gave her one year of living expenses as a Christmas gift so that she could write. This was a great help to Lee, and she finished her first manuscript in 1957, which was recently published under the name of Go Set a Watchman. At the time, the publisher rejected the manuscript but was interested enough to ask Lee to make a few changes. The changed manuscript was published in 1960 as To Kill a Mockingbird.

Her book has several autobiographical elements to it, including the fact that her father defended two black men and lost the case, after which he stopped taking criminal cases. Scout's friend Dill was inspired by Truman Capote, who was Lee's friend. Many of the characters in the book are inspired by real people she knew.

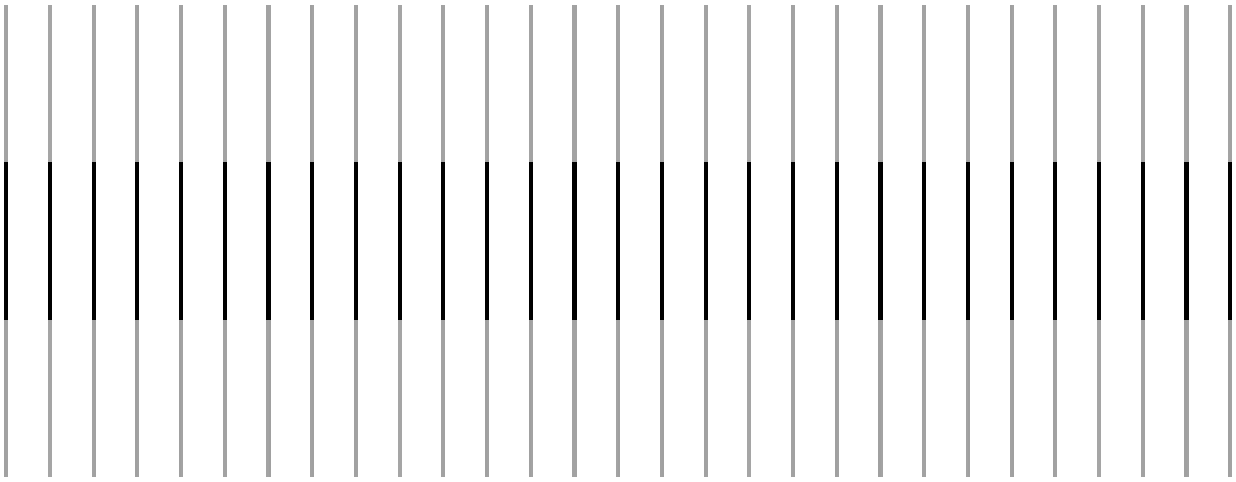
After suffering from a stroke, Lee passed away in February 2016.

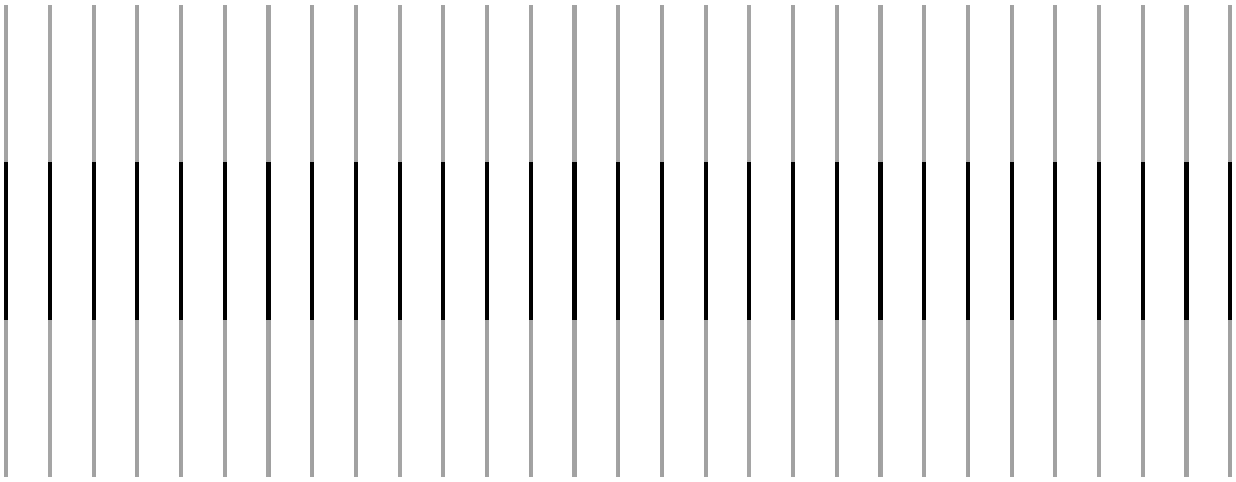
Discussion Questions



question 1

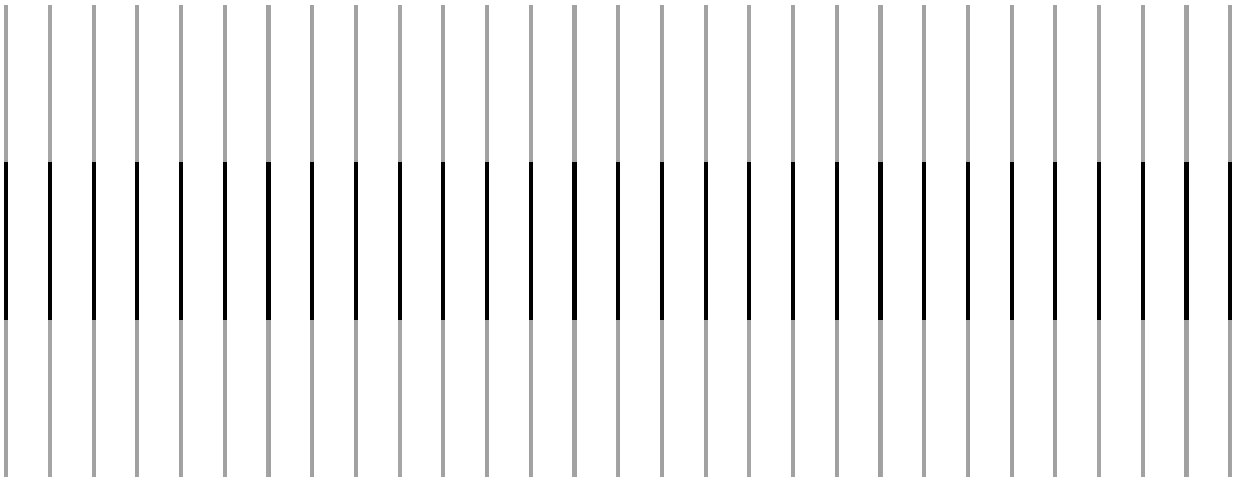
For an acclaimed novel on racism, To Kill a Mockingbird has no black characters (except Calpurnia) that are fleshed out. Why do you think this is the case?

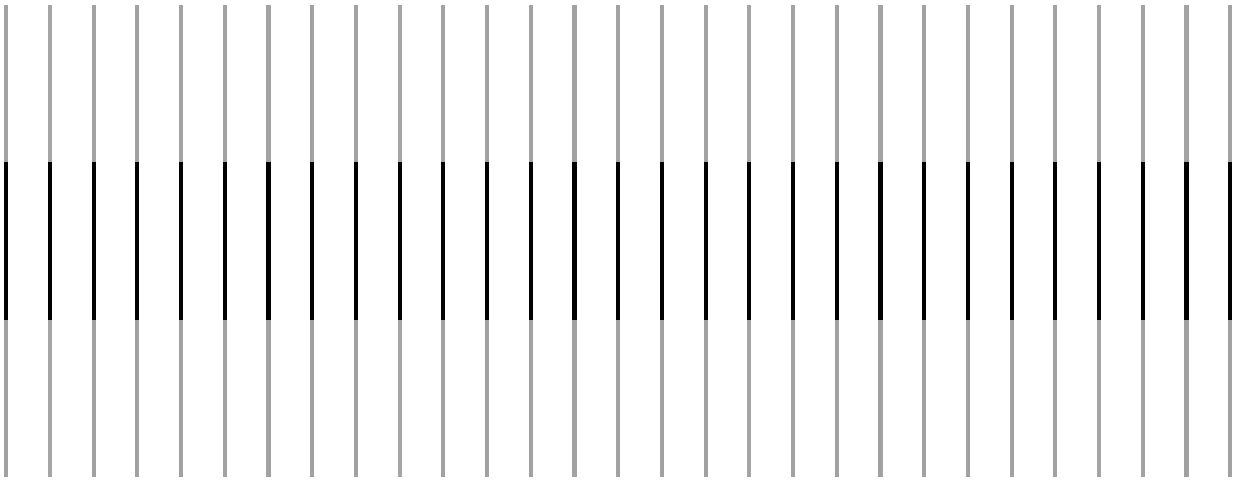




question 2

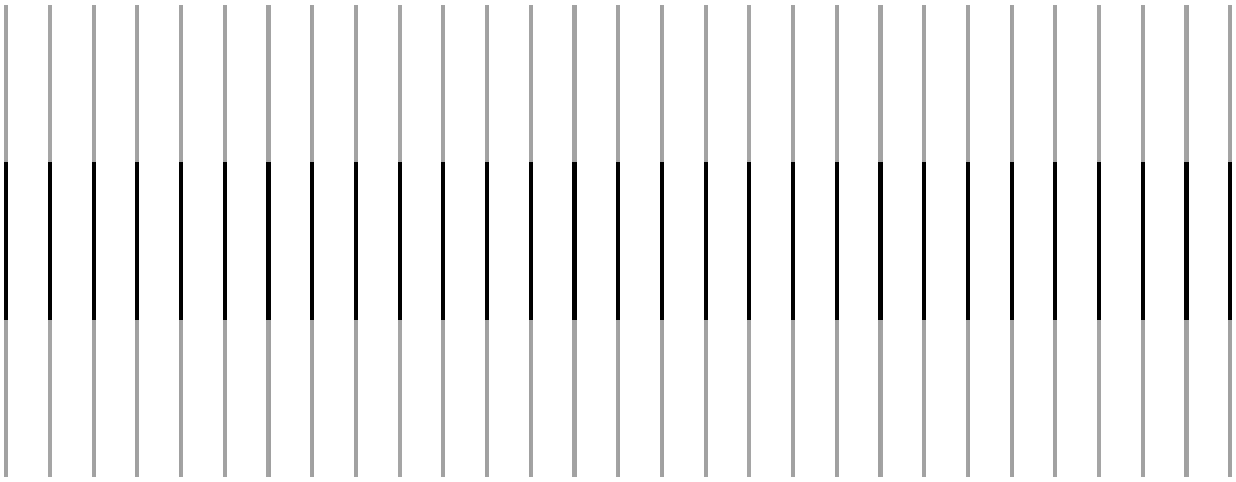
The story is seen through the eyes of Scout, a young girl who lacks real understanding and awareness of the problems of racism. Do you think the story could have been more nuanced if shown from someone else’s perspective? What kind of character would this person be?

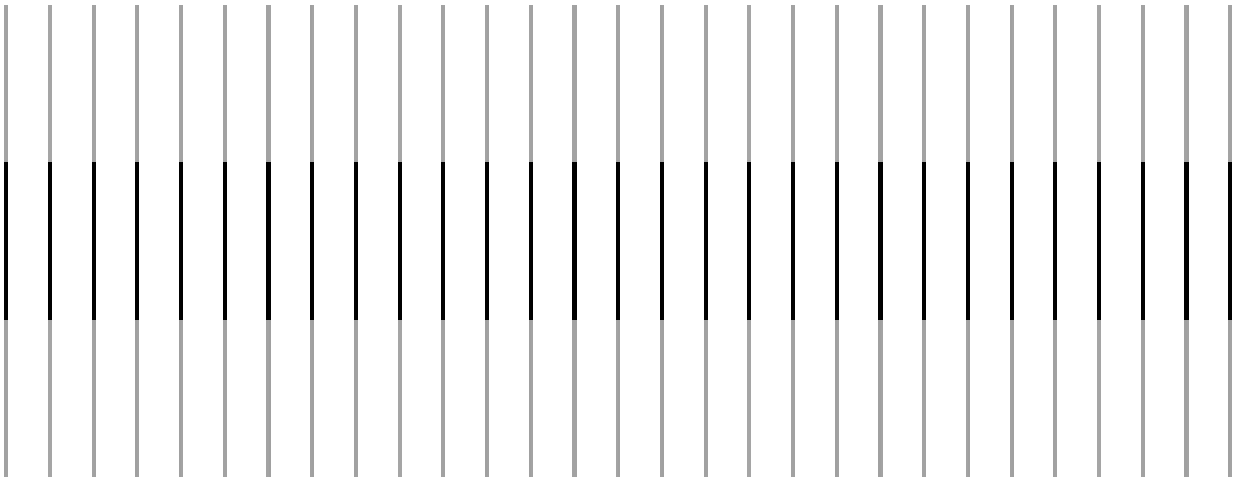




question 3

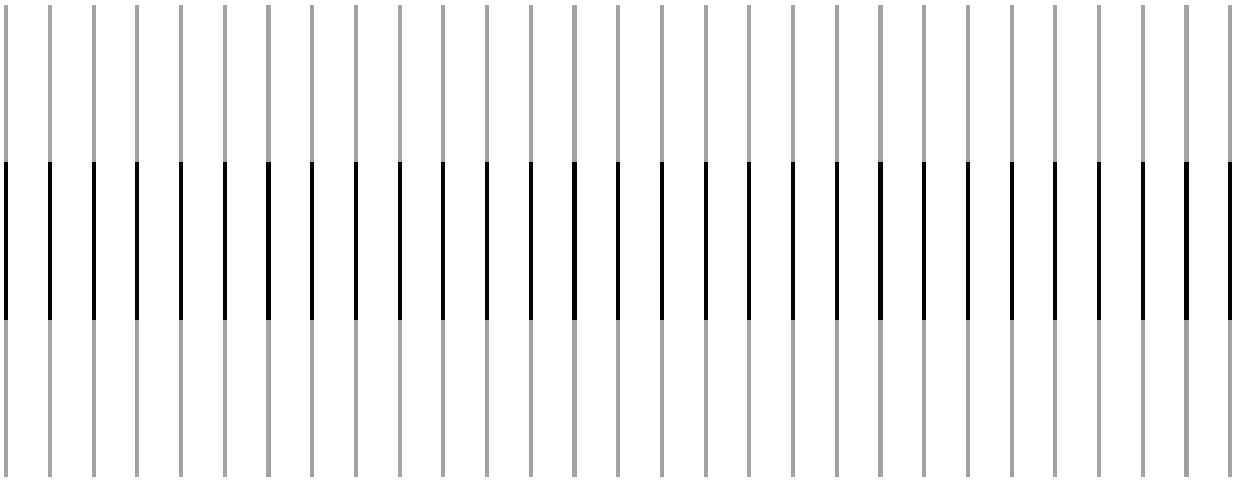
In the story, an inordinate amount of time is spent on discussing Boo Radley by the children. The same man also rescues them from the disgruntled Ewell’s attack. What is the significance of this character?

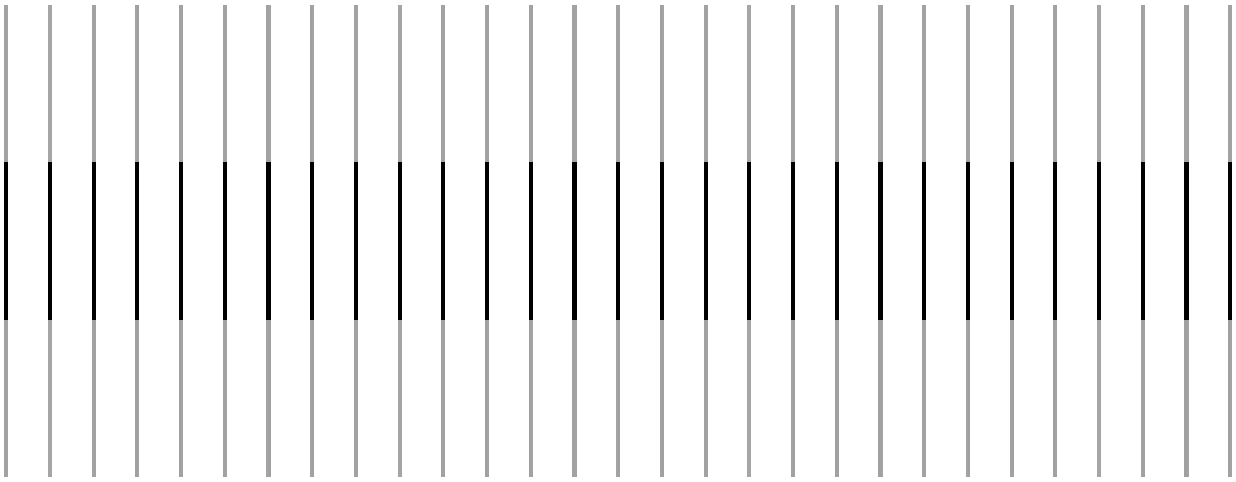




question 4

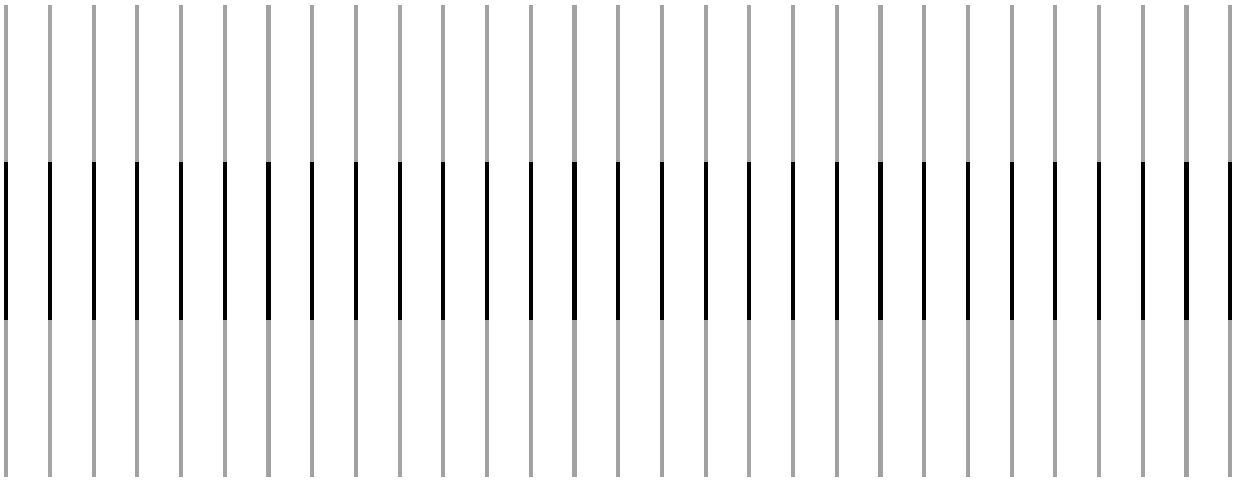
Atticus tells his children that it is a wrong to kill a mockingbird. Considering the title of the book, who exactly do you think is the mockingbird and why?

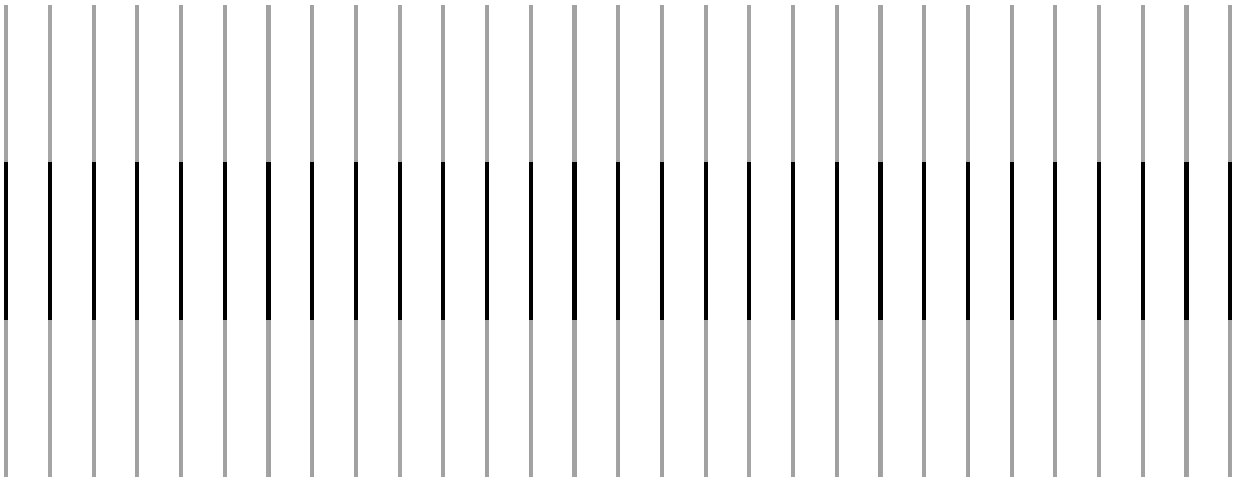




question 5

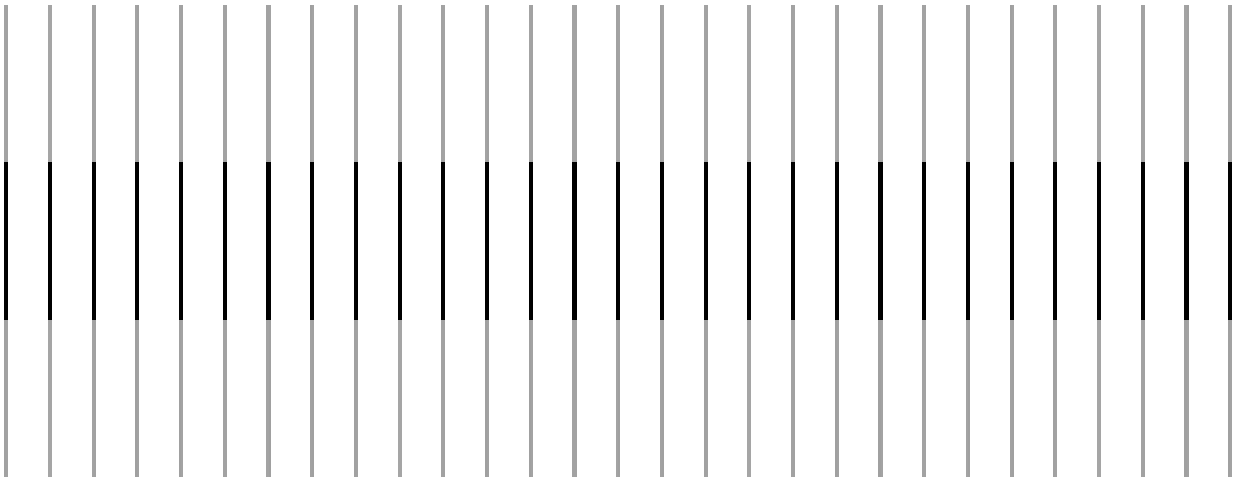
The novel is divided into two parts. The first where the children endlessly discuss Boo Radley and the second where the trial of Tom Robinson is described. In what way do you think the two sections are connected? Why do you think the author chose this way of storytelling?

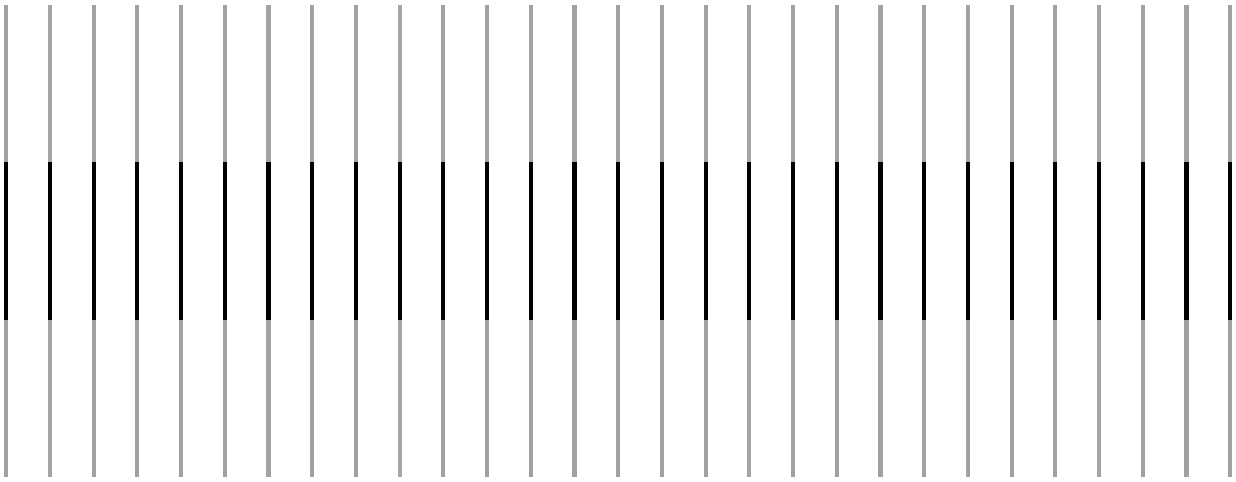




question 6

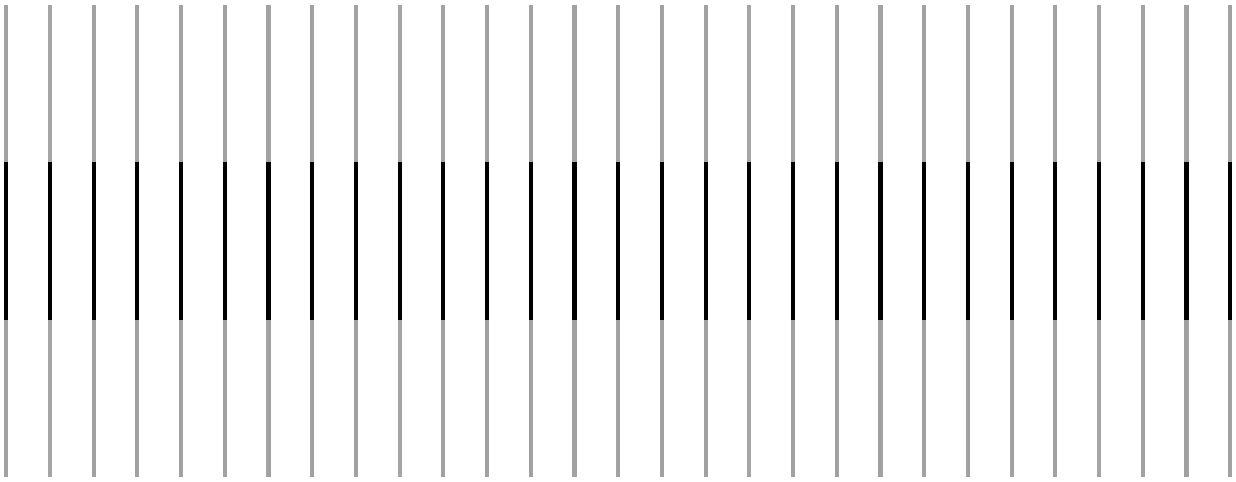
While Atticus Finch teaches his children not to judge people based on their skin color, he also teaches them not to judge people by their bigotry and to be tolerant of racists. How do you feel about the lesson he taught his children? Do you think we should all be tolerant of each other, regardless of our differences?

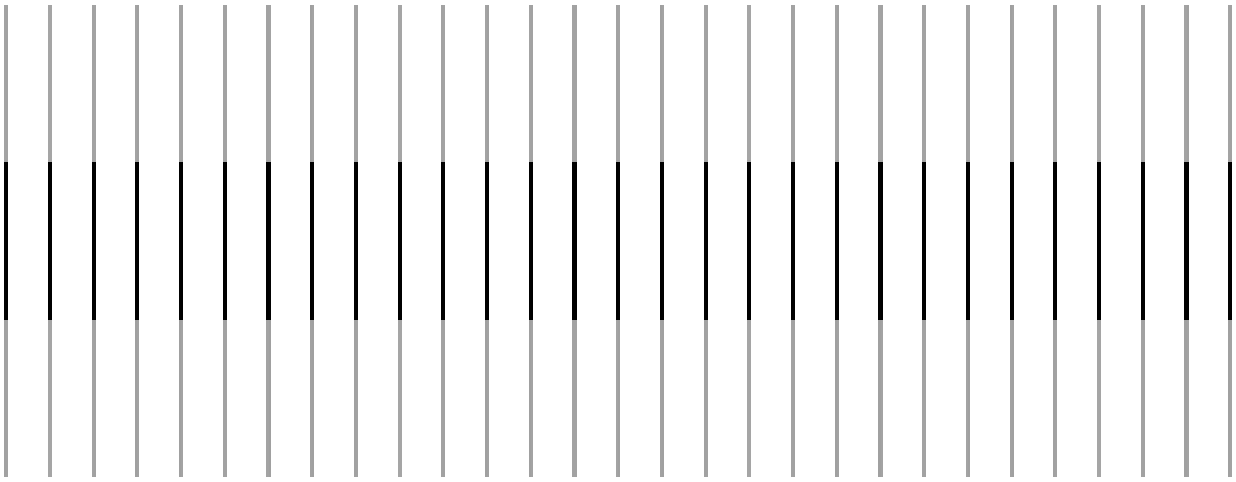




question 7

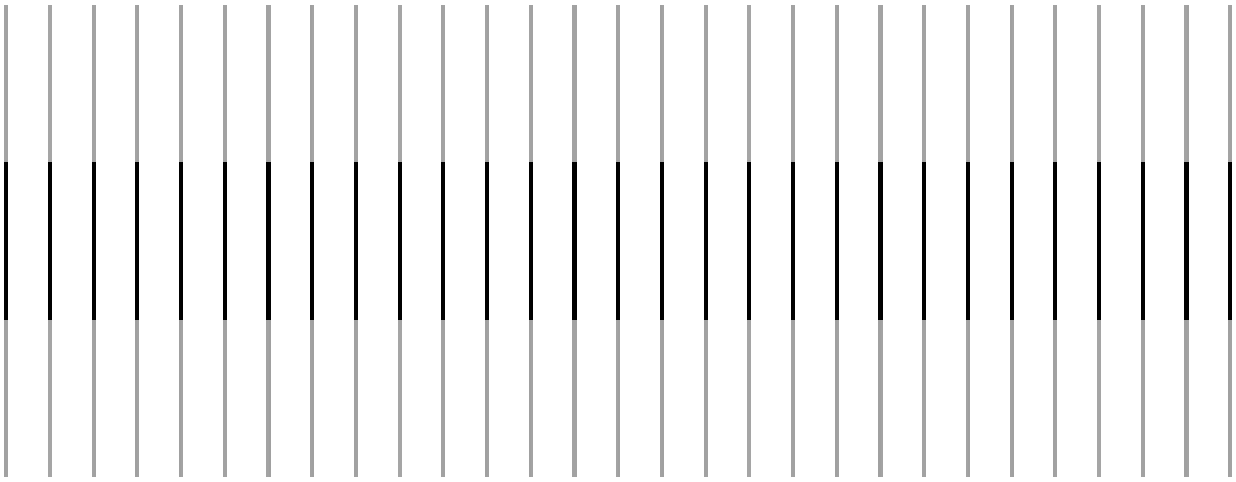
Mrs. Dubose is a racist woman who abuses Atticus. When Jem retaliates by destroying her plants, Atticus sentences him to read to the woman and even calls her a “great lady.” Would you classify this as child abuse or not, and why? Do you think Jem could learn anything from this experience apart from showing that racists must be tolerated, and abuse must be silently accepted? Give your reasons.

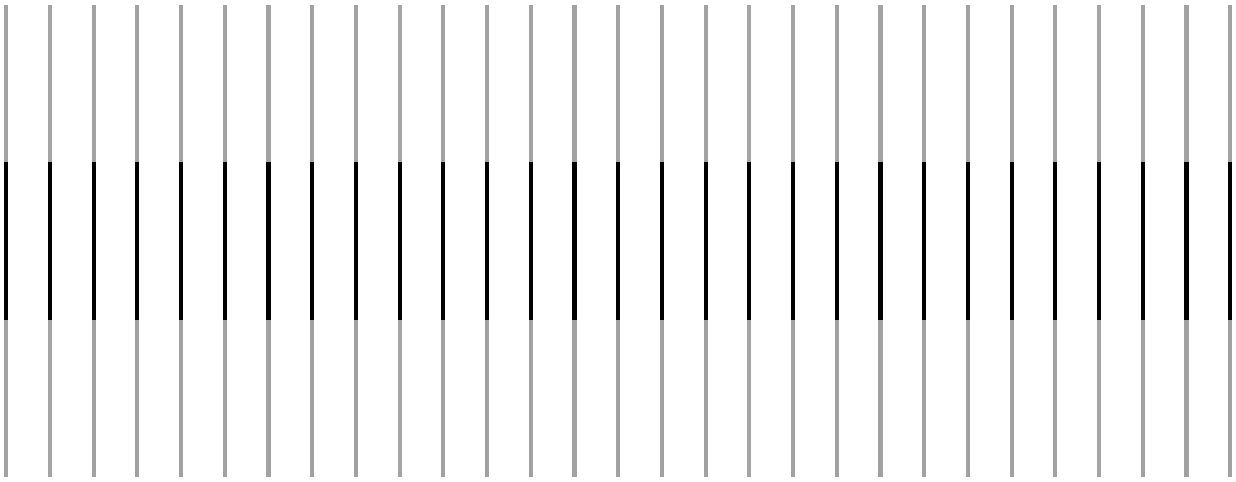




question 8

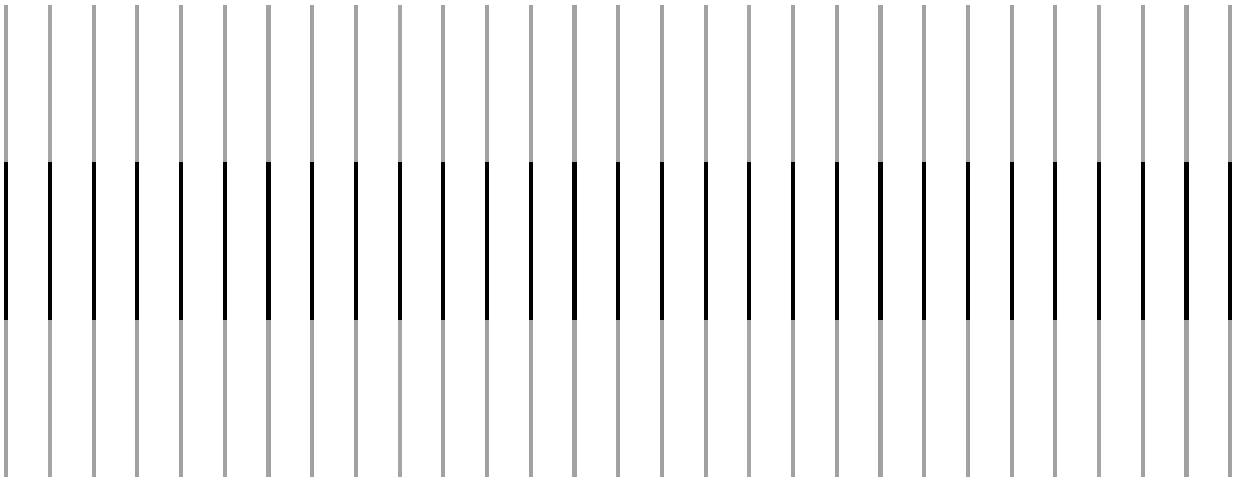
The trial was a big deal in Maycomb, affecting everyone because a white man got involved in the legal defense of a black man. How is Scout’s character affected throughout the trial, if at all?

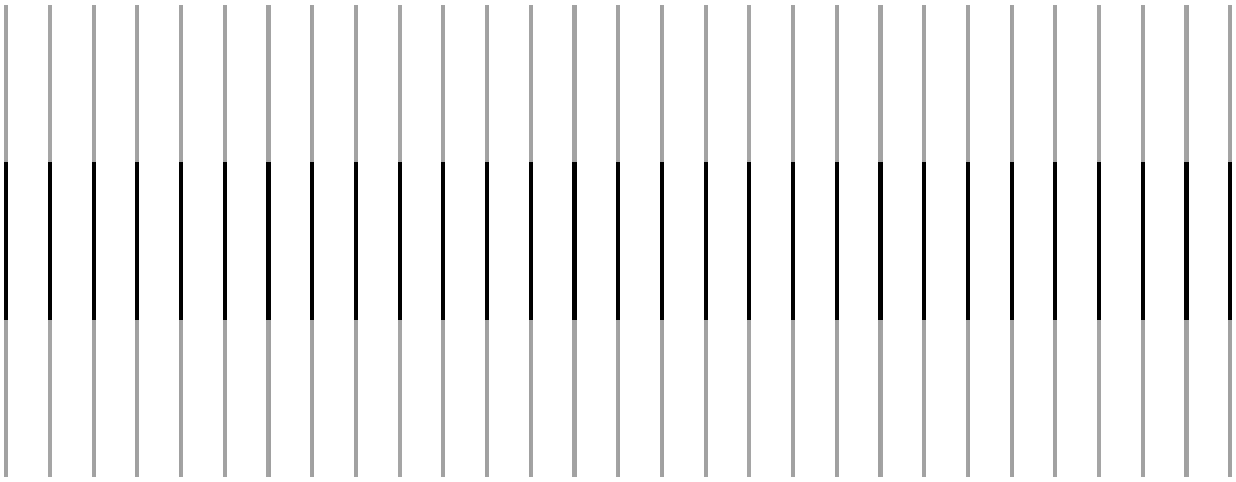




question 9

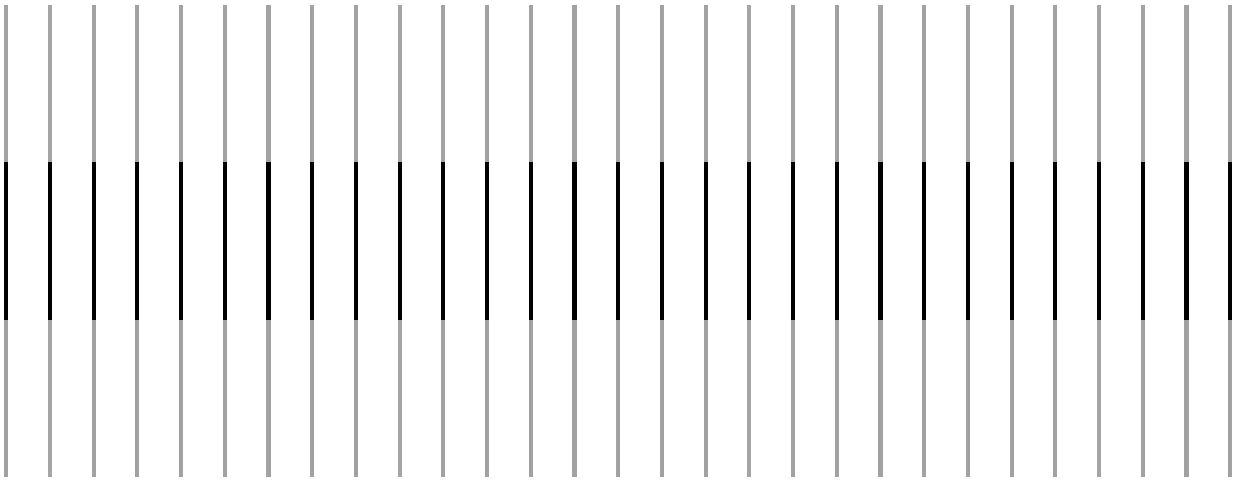
Atticus Finch is a white man who takes up the challenge to defend a black man falsely accused of rape, but he does not condemn the prejudiced people around him. No black person, except Calpurnia, has been depicted in the book and the entire story is told through the eyes of a white child. Why do you think the author had so few black characters in her book?

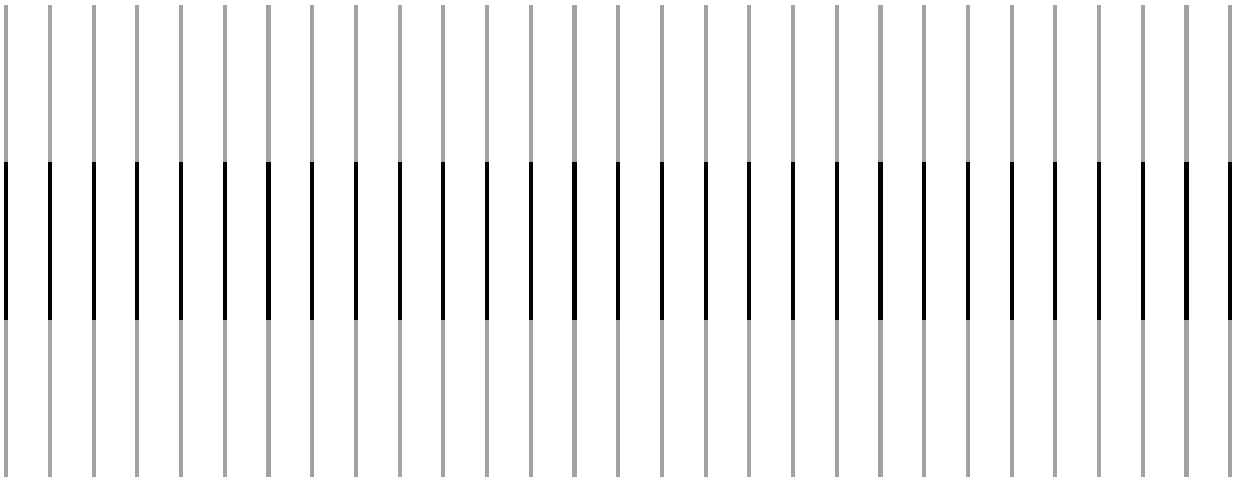




question 10

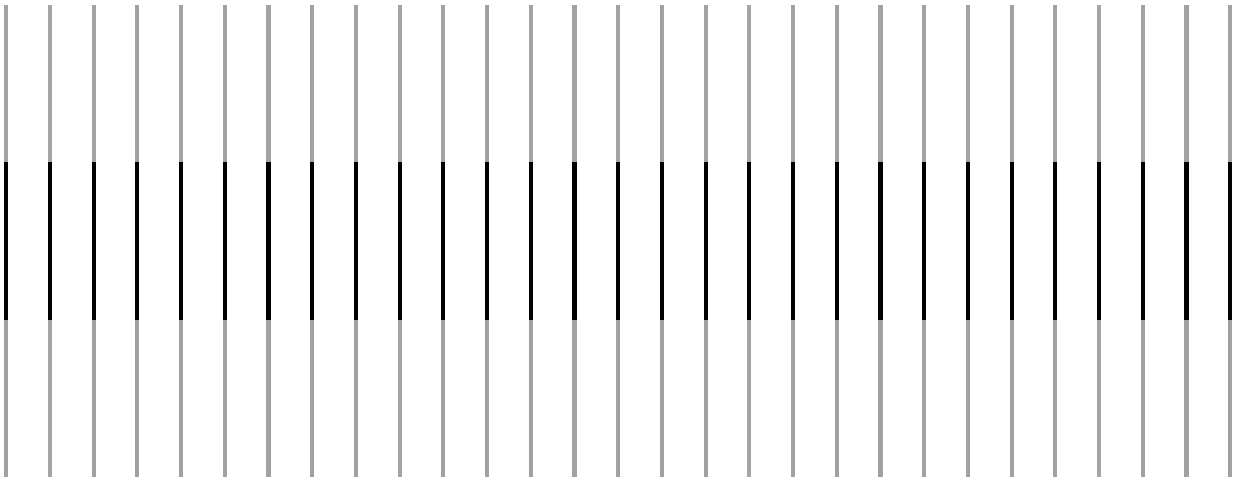
Mayella Ewell tries to seduce Robinson, but fearing her father she accuses him of rape. How far would you hold her guilty in this case?

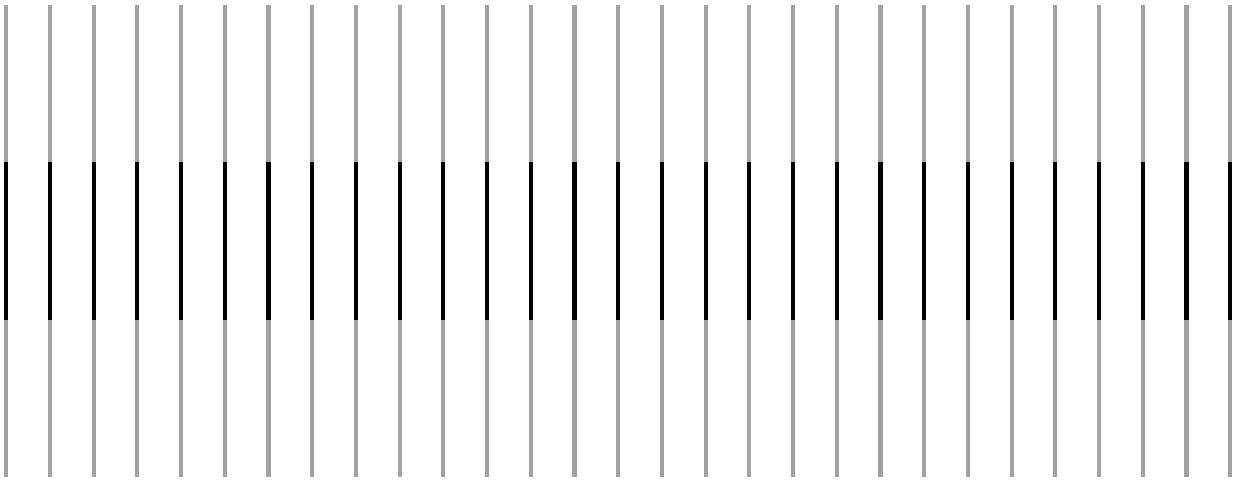




question 11

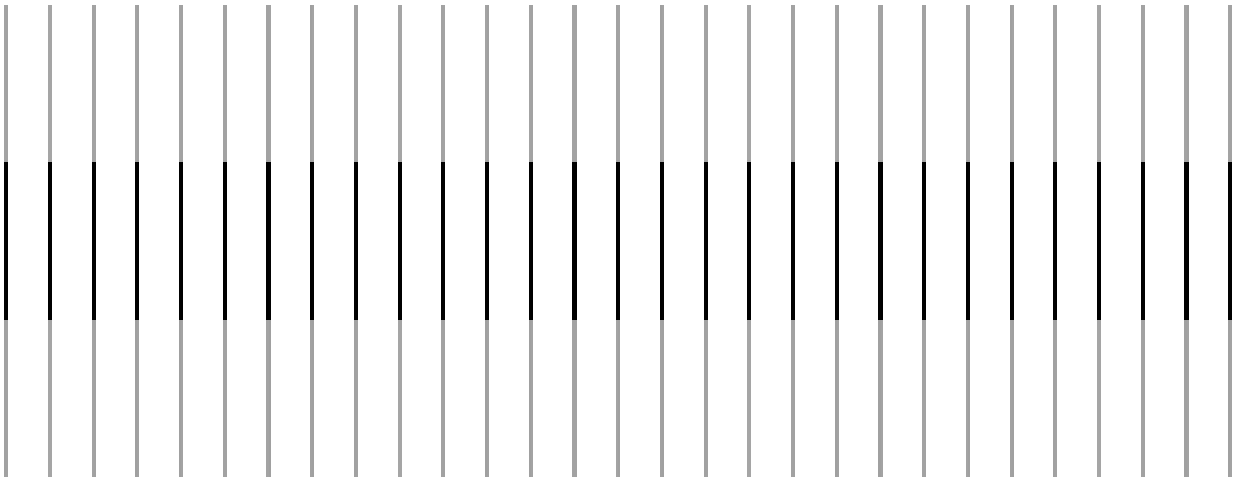
Tom Robinson is the one person who doesn’t get much time at all in the book. What is your impression of the man? Is he capable of rape or any kind of crime? Is he a good man? Why or why not?

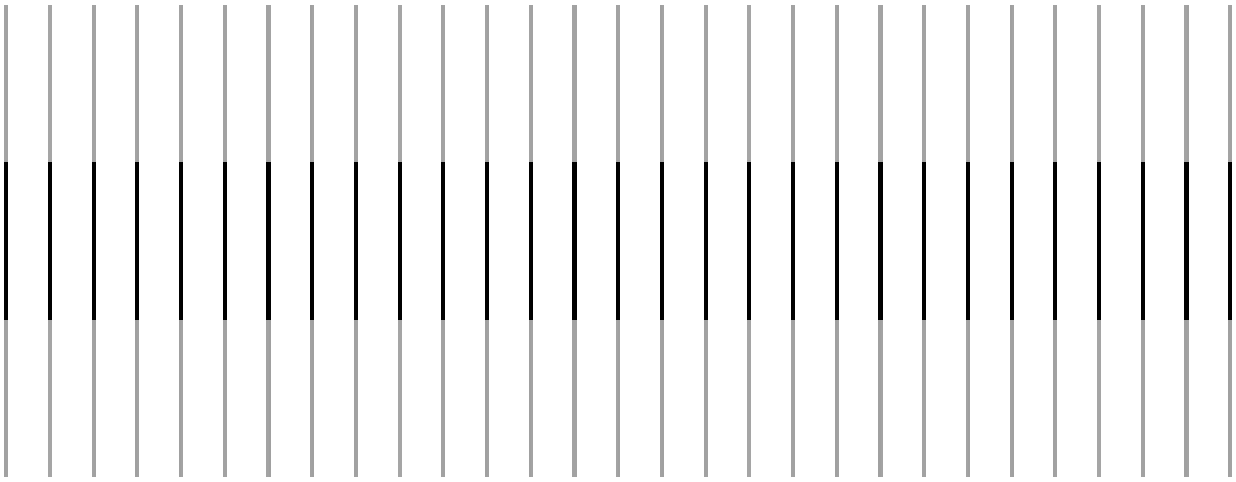




question 12

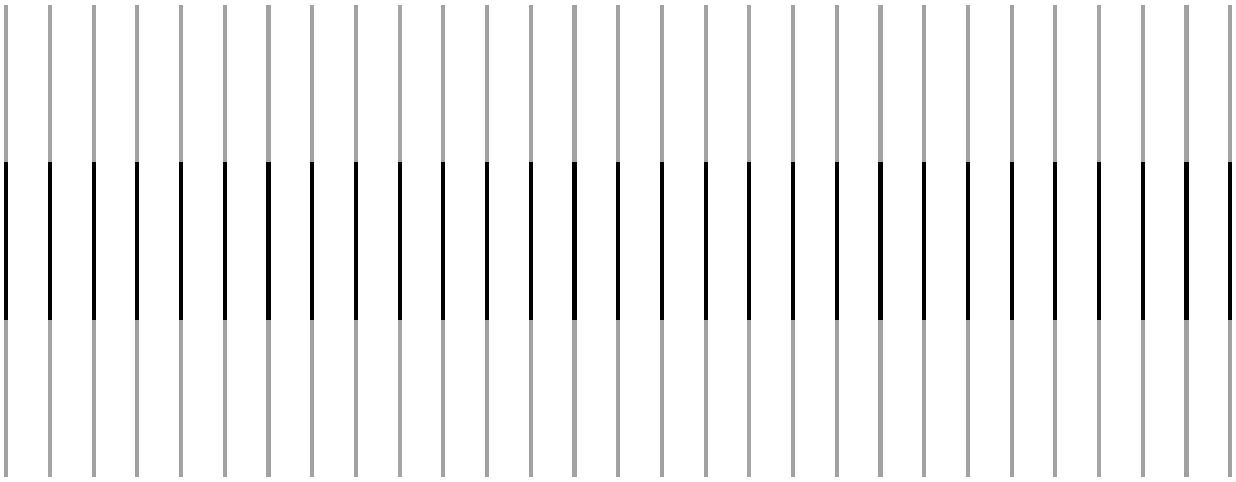
Dolphus Raymond is a white man who lives in the black community with a black woman. What kind of difficulties do you think he would have faced? Do you think the woman he lived with might also have faced difficulties from her community? Explain.

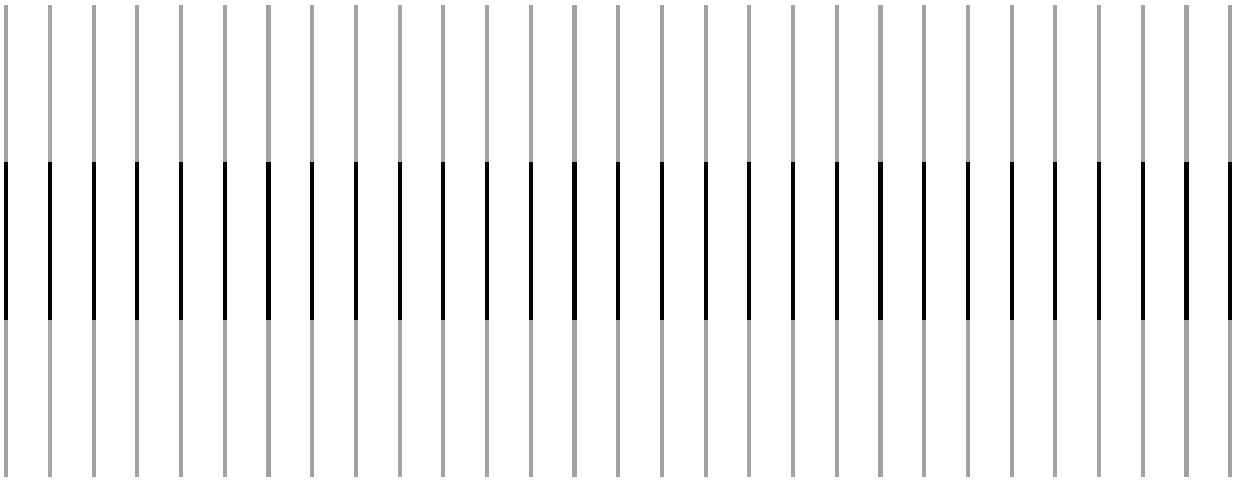




question 13

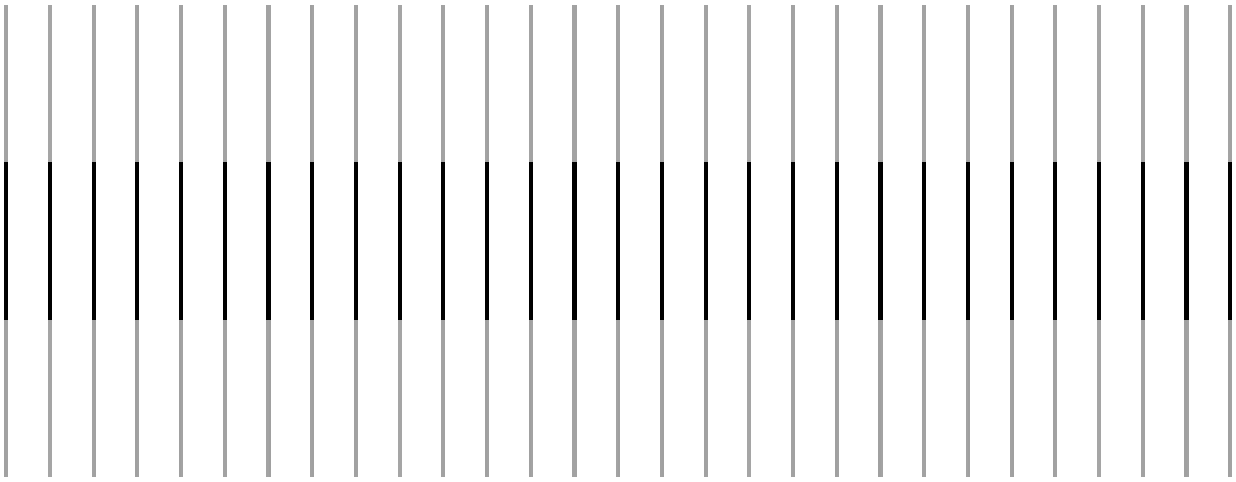
After the trial, Bob Ewell was angry even though he had won the case. Why do you think Ewell was so angry with Atticus that he threatened him and then attacked his children?

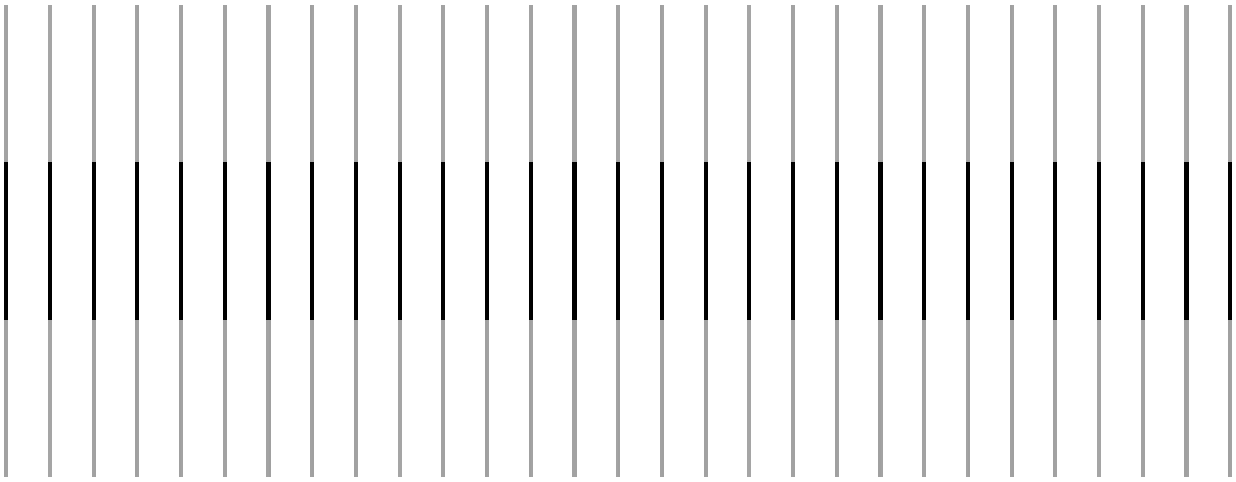




question 14

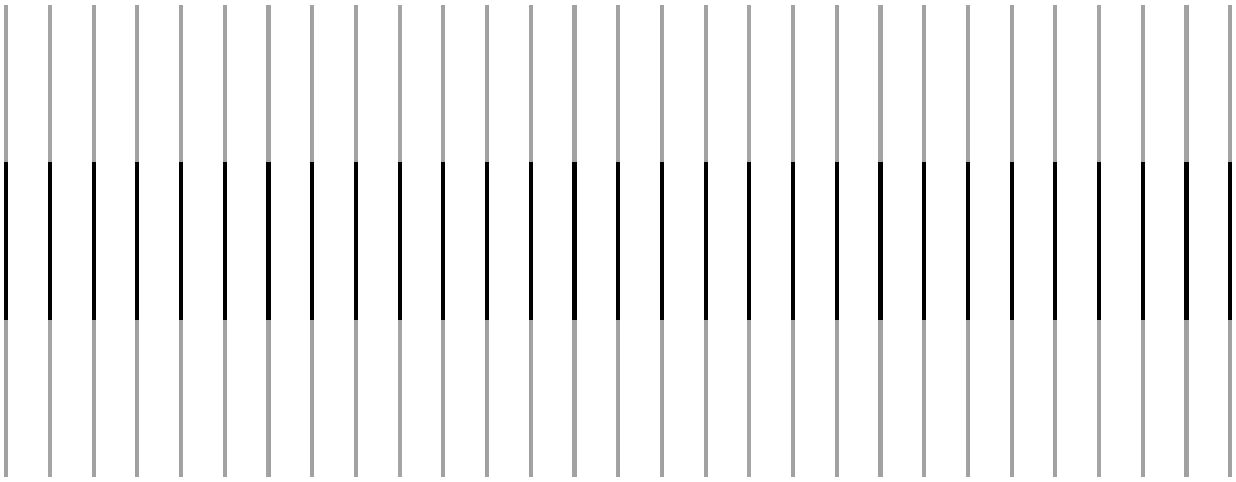
At her aunt’s tea party, Scout heard the ladies worrying about children in Africa, but at the same time, they were also quite racist about the black people who lived near them. How sincere do you think these women are in their concern for Africans?

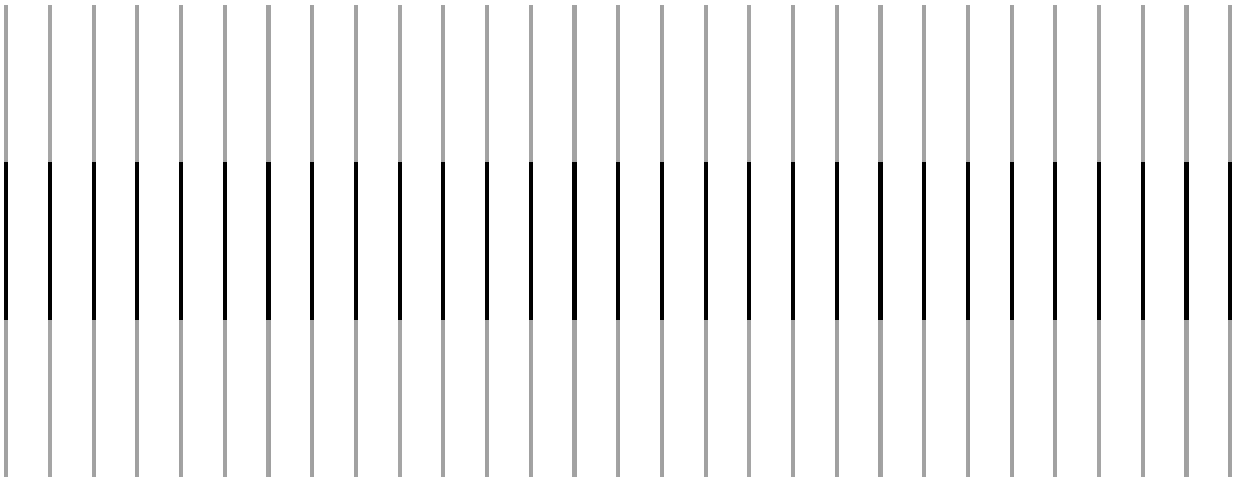




question 15

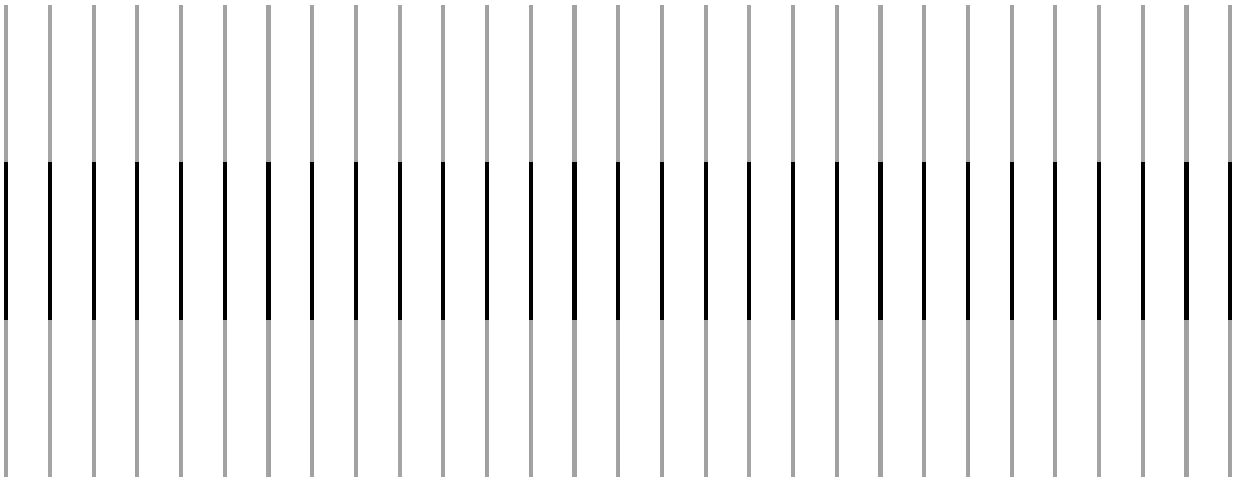
Ms. Gates was Scout’s teacher, and she insisted that America isn’t as prejudiced as Hitler’s Germany. Do you agree with her? Why or why not?

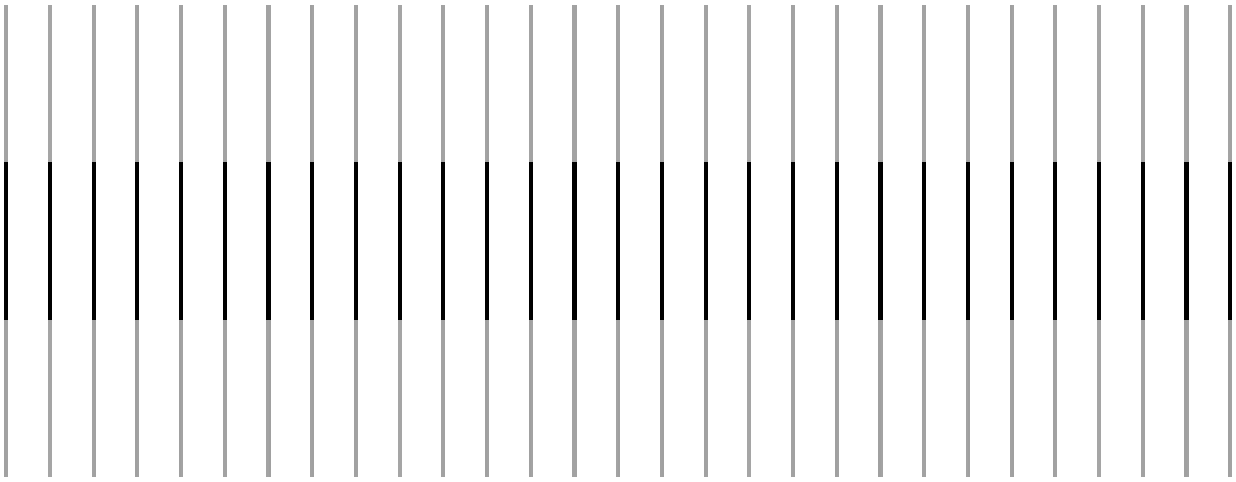




question 16

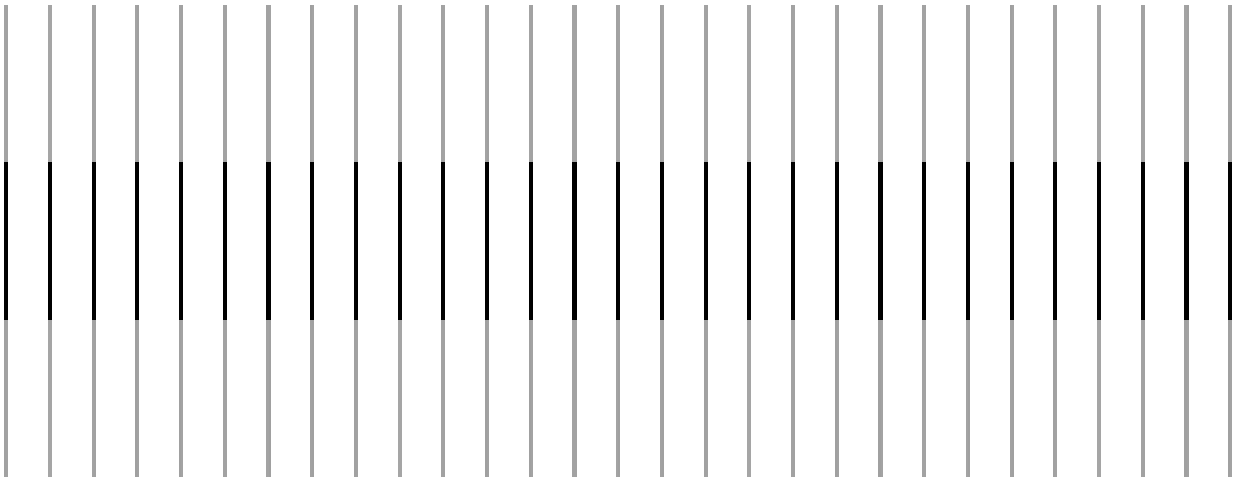
Harper Lee won the Pulitzer Prize for her book. Why do you think it was given to her, considering that there are a large number of structural and grammatical problems with the book?

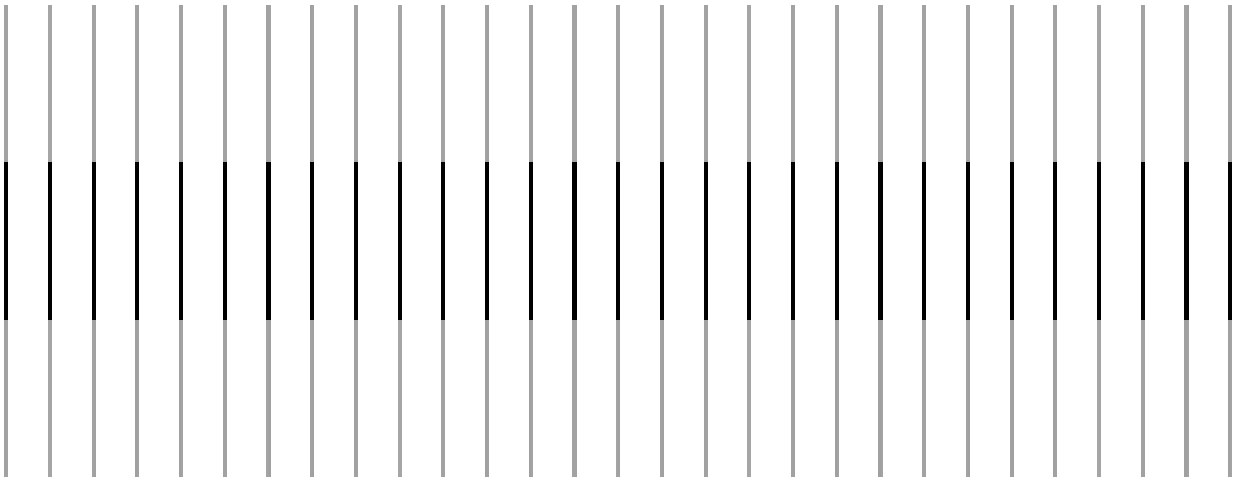




question 17

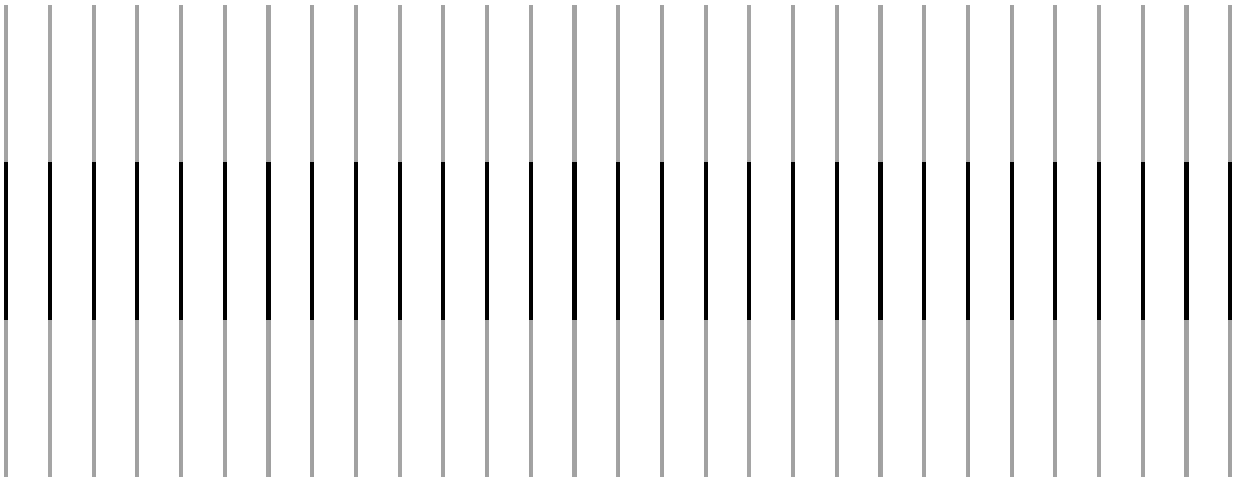
Lee won the Presidential Medal of Freedom. While presenting it, President Bush claimed that the book had positively influenced the character of the United States. What do you think he meant by that? Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

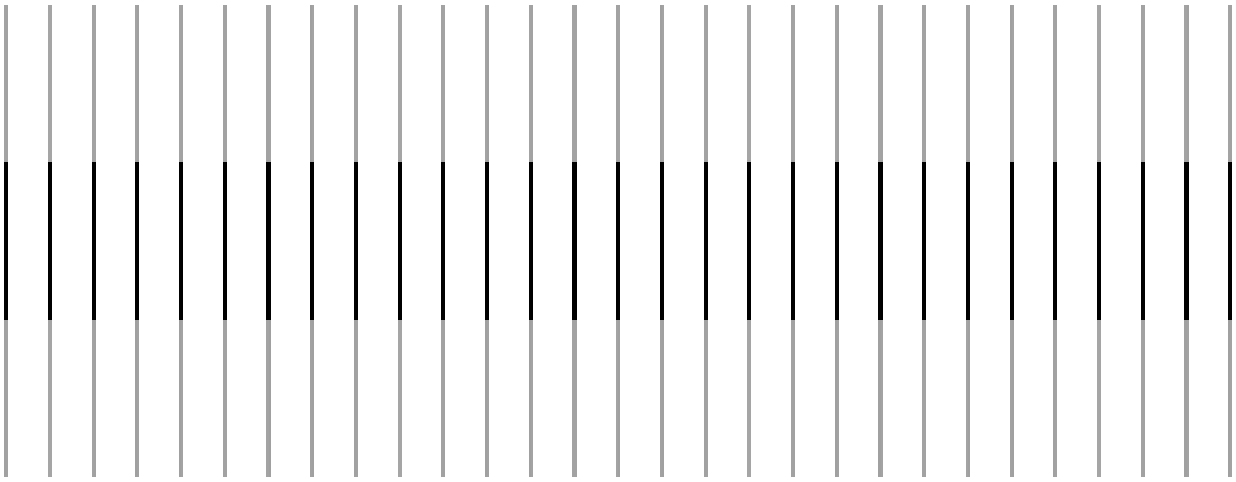




question 18

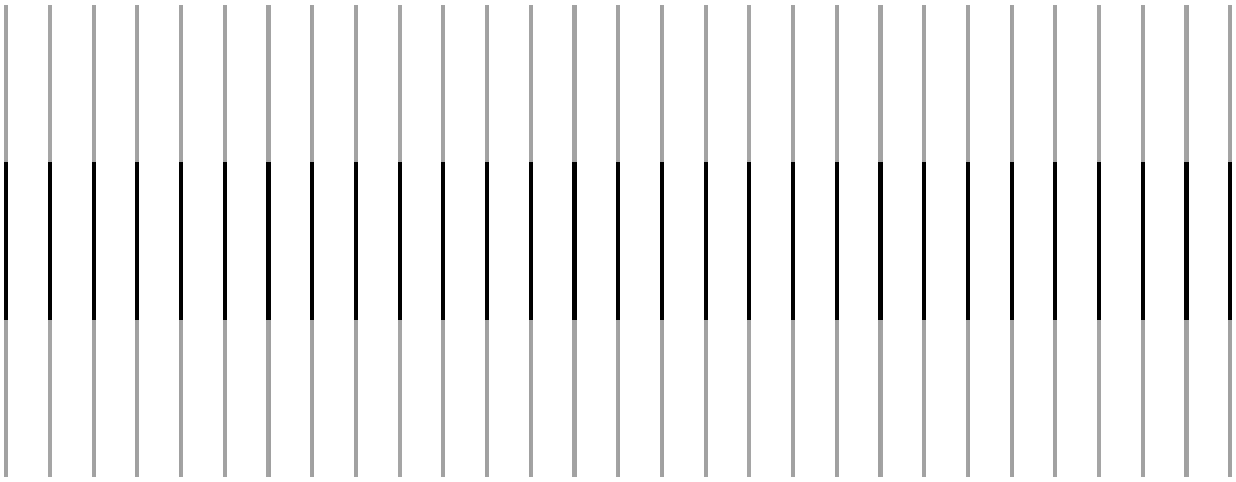
President Obama presented Lee with the National Medal of Arts, which is the highest award bestowed upon an individual for their contribution to the support, growth, and excellence of the arts. Do you think Lee made so much of a contribution to the growth of the arts, considering she wrote only one book? Give reasons.

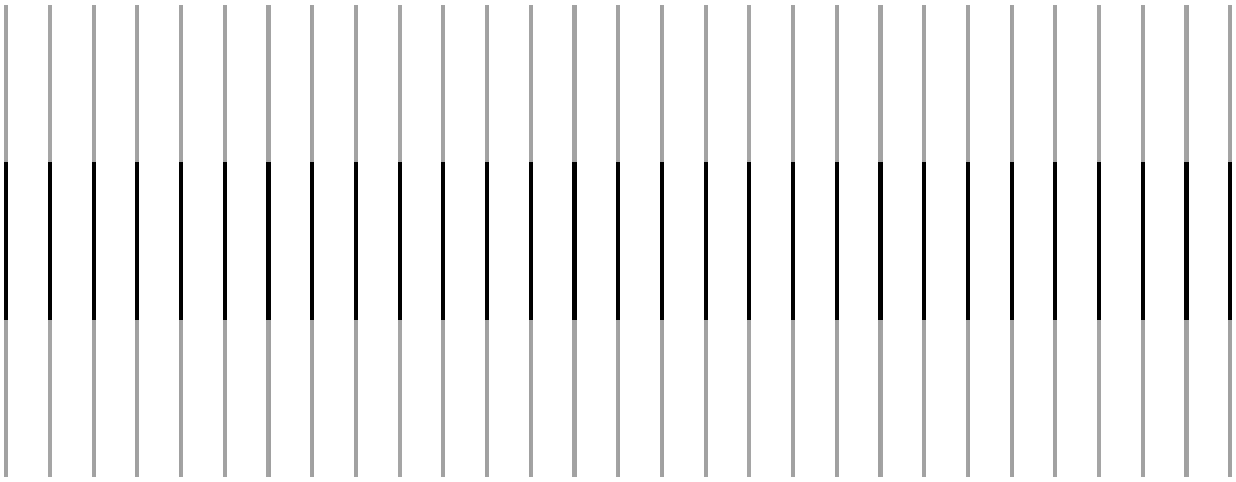




question 19

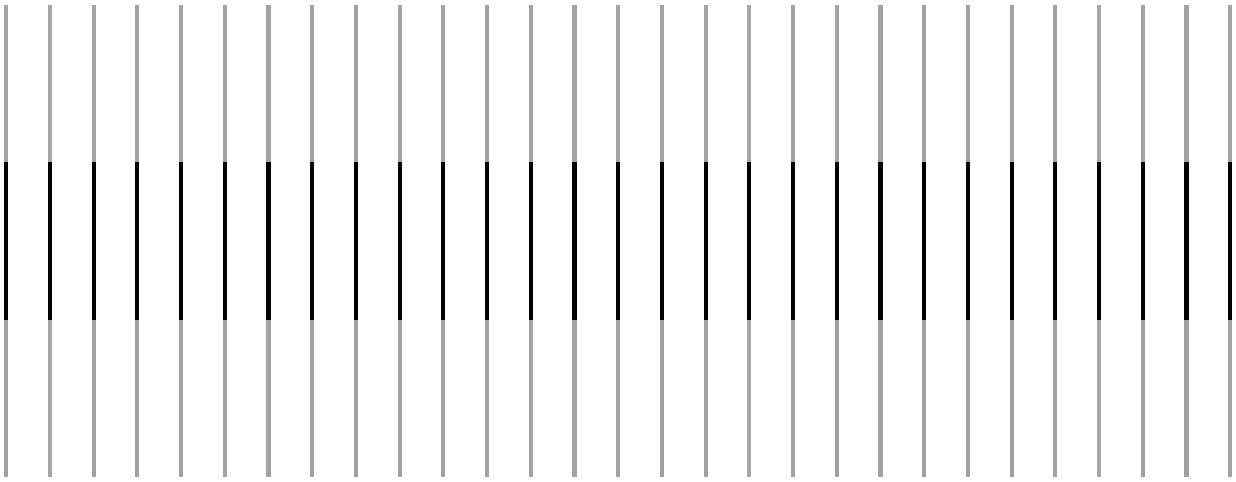
To Kill a Mockingbird is considered an American classic and is taught in schools to tackle racism. How effective do you think the book is in teaching students against racism?

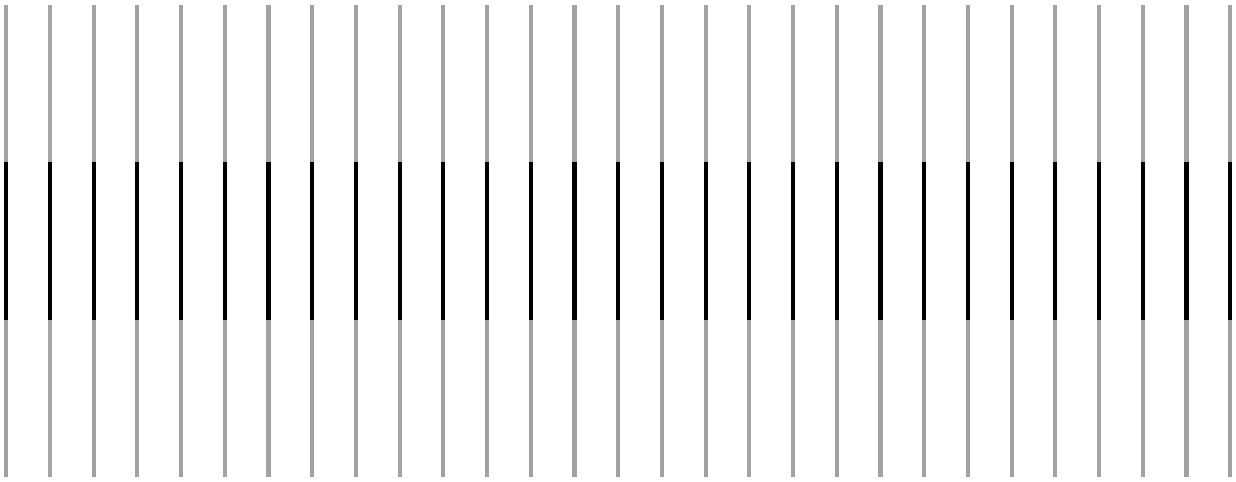




question 20

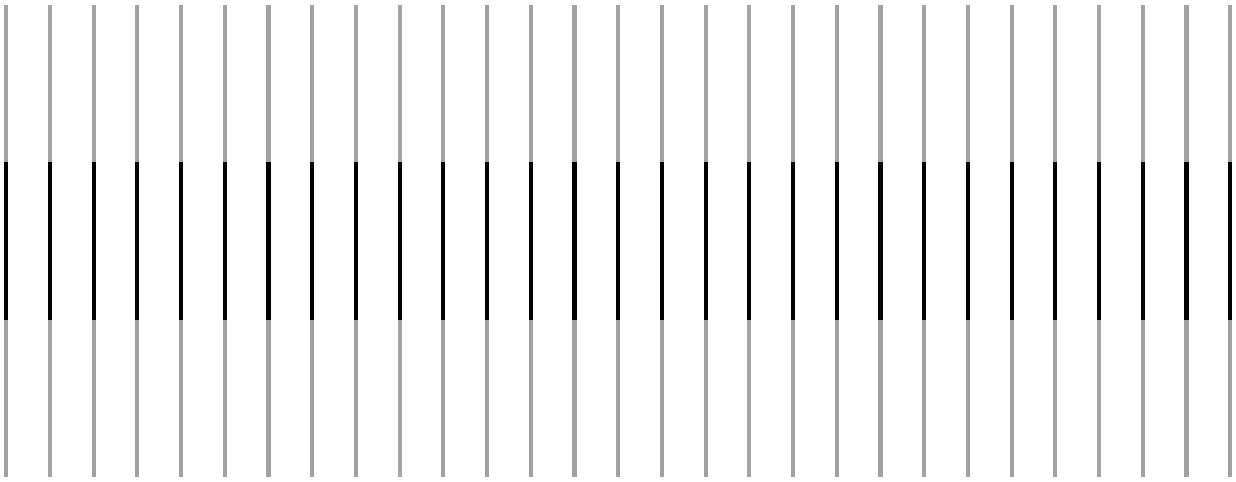
The Guardian's review of 2013 claims that the book has many layers of meaning. Do you agree? If so, what are the layers you can find? If not, why not?

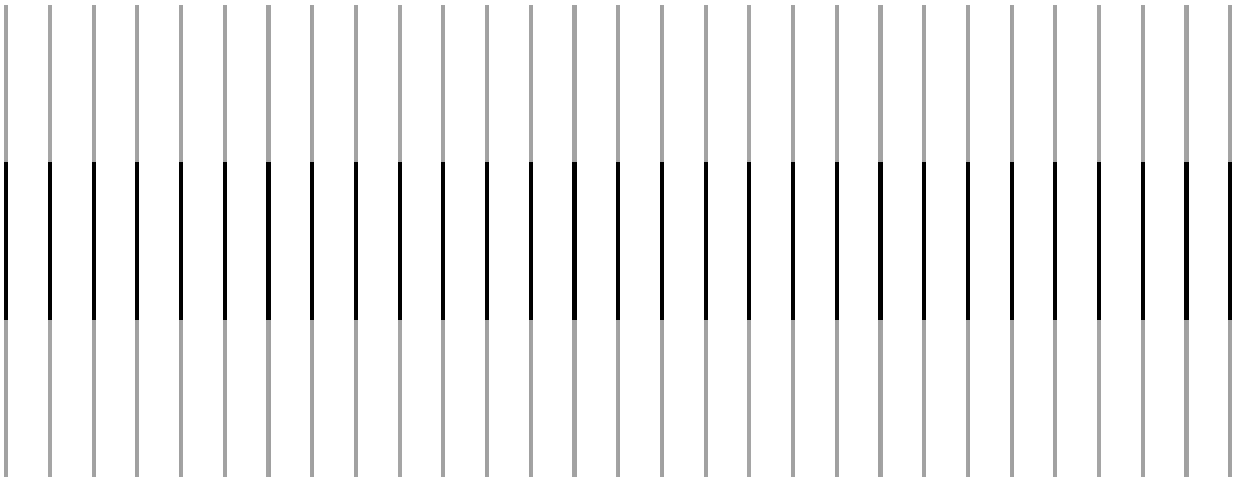




question 21

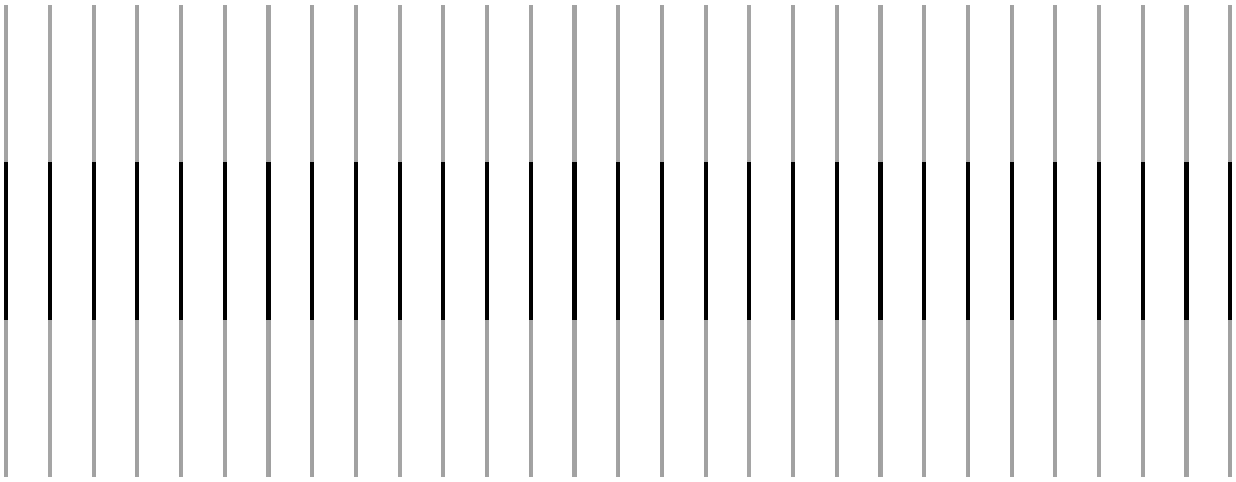
The Atlantic published a review in 1960 when the book first came out. According to the review, the book was sugar-water served with humor and "completely impossible" because the story is told by an innocent young girl. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

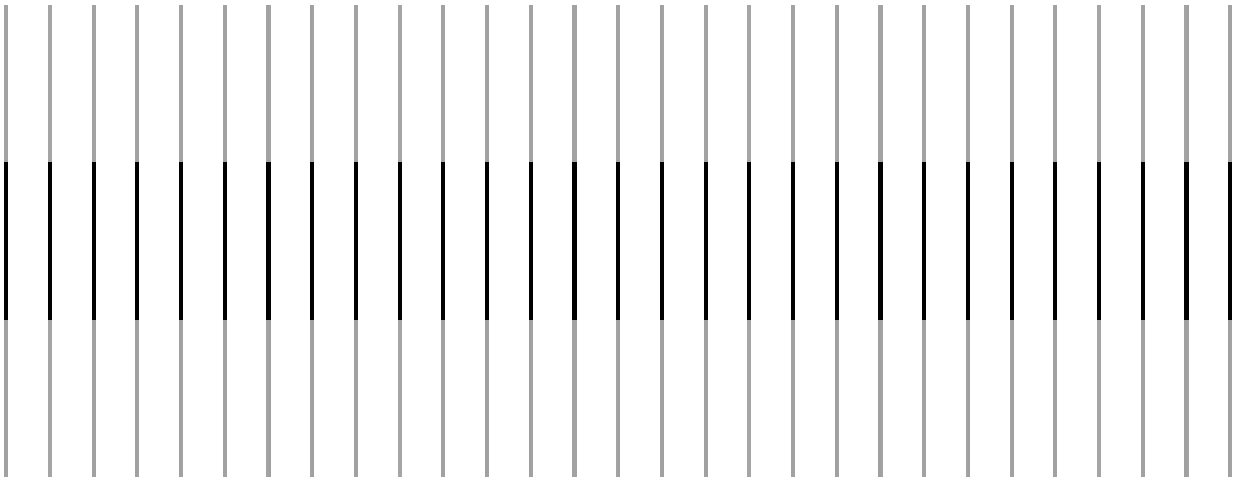




question 22

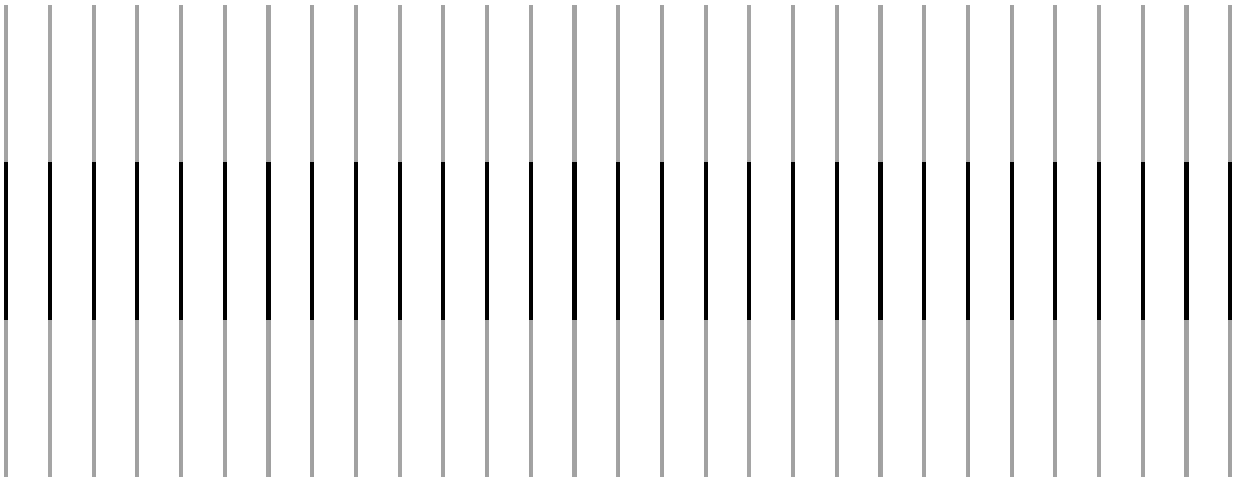
Time Magazine's original review compares To Kill a Mockingbird to The Member of the Wedding. What similarities do you think these two books have, if any?

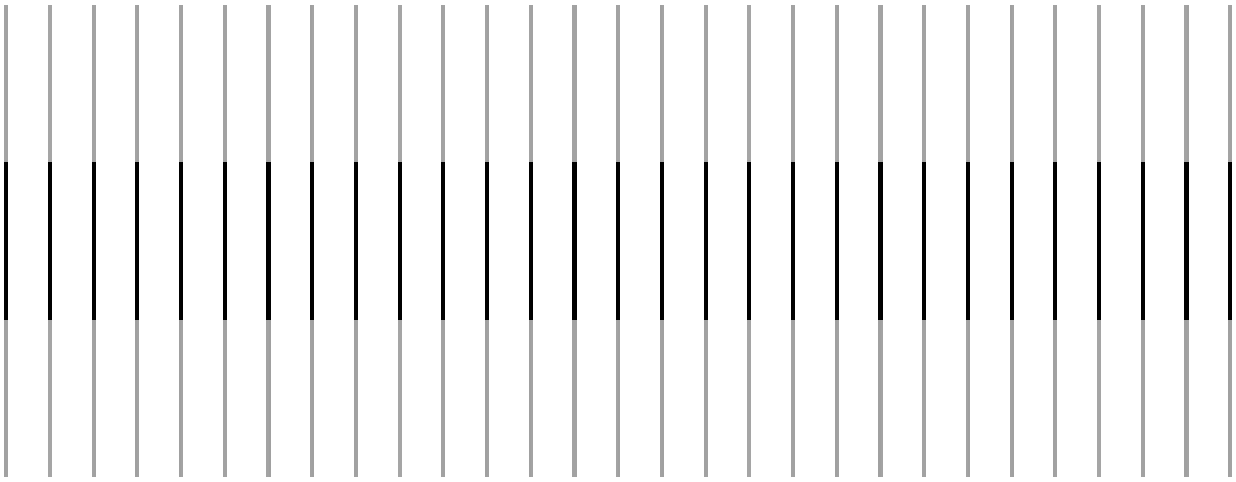




question 23

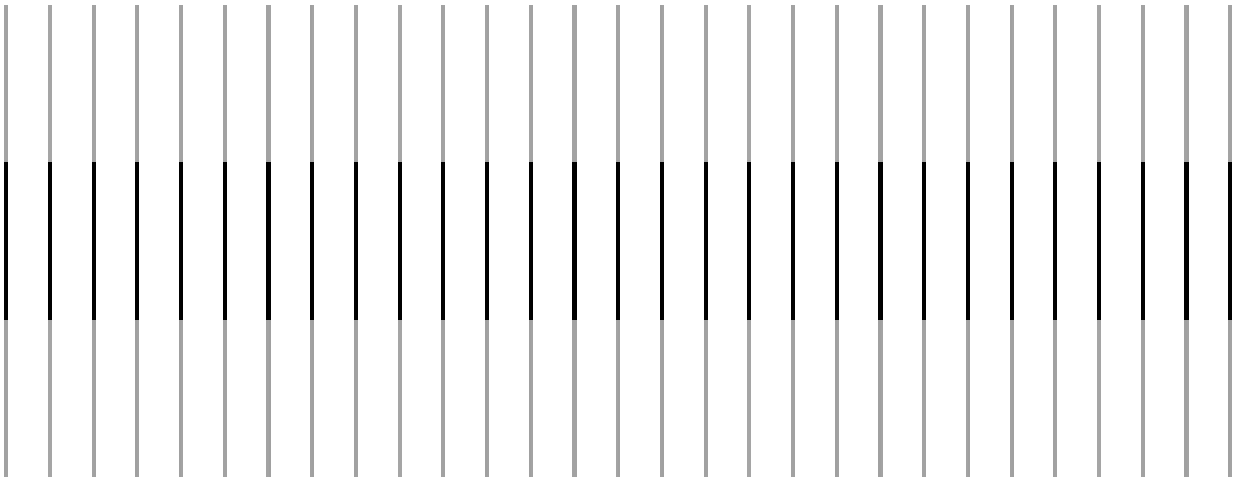
The original review of The Los Angeles Times says that the climax of the book is comic, tender, and searing. Do you agree with these adjectives? What other adjectives would you like to use for this book?

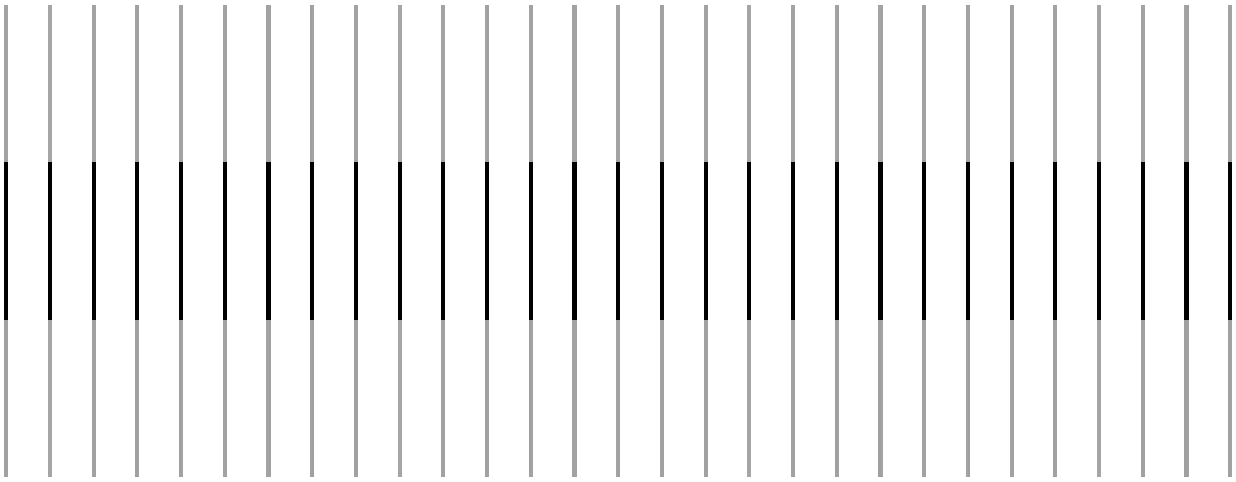




question 24

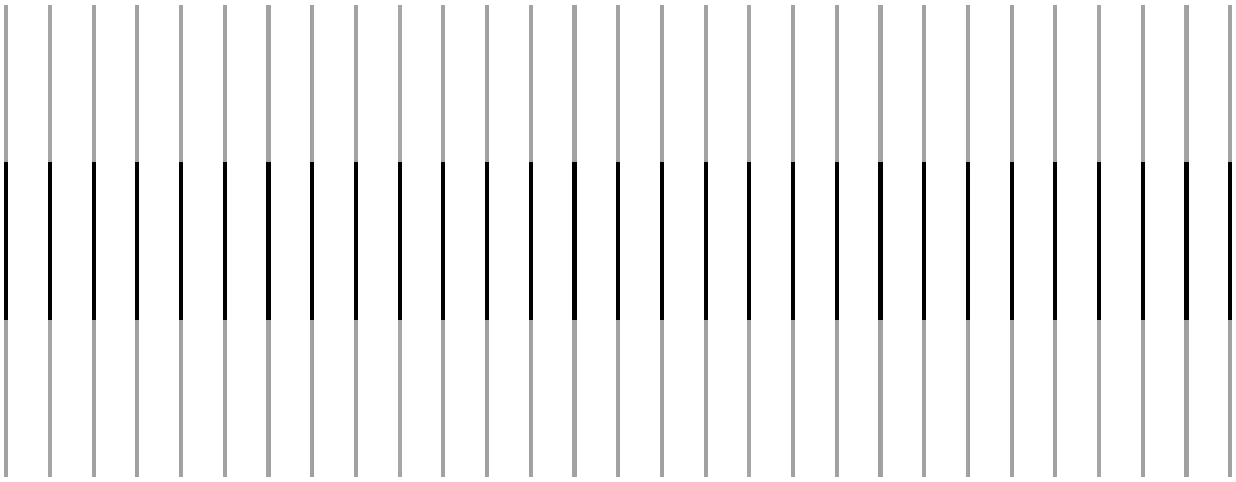
The original Telegraph review of the book claims that as a genre, it is superb. In which genre would you put To Kill a Mockingbird (apart from Classics)?

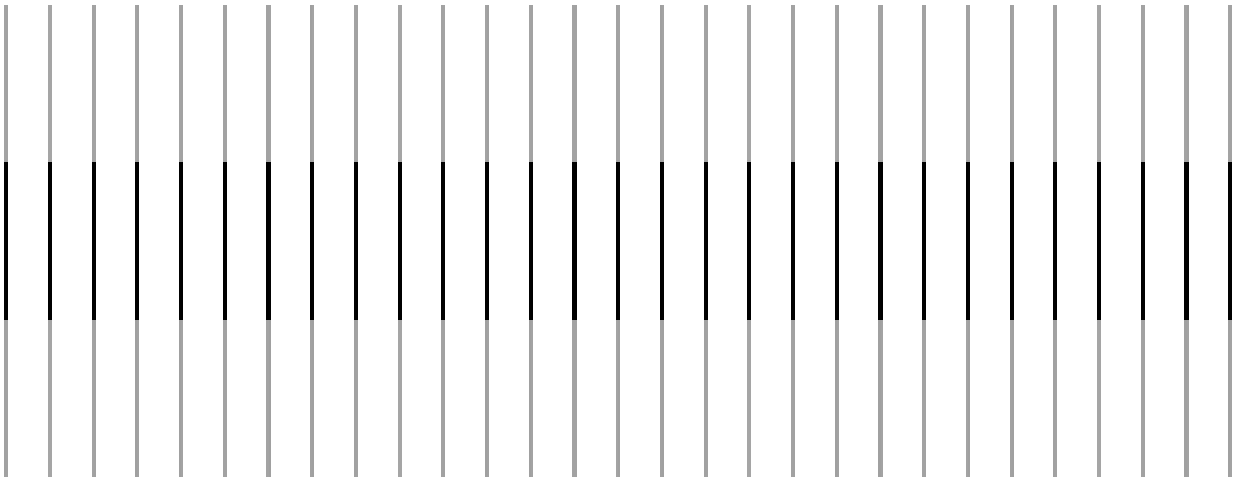




question 25

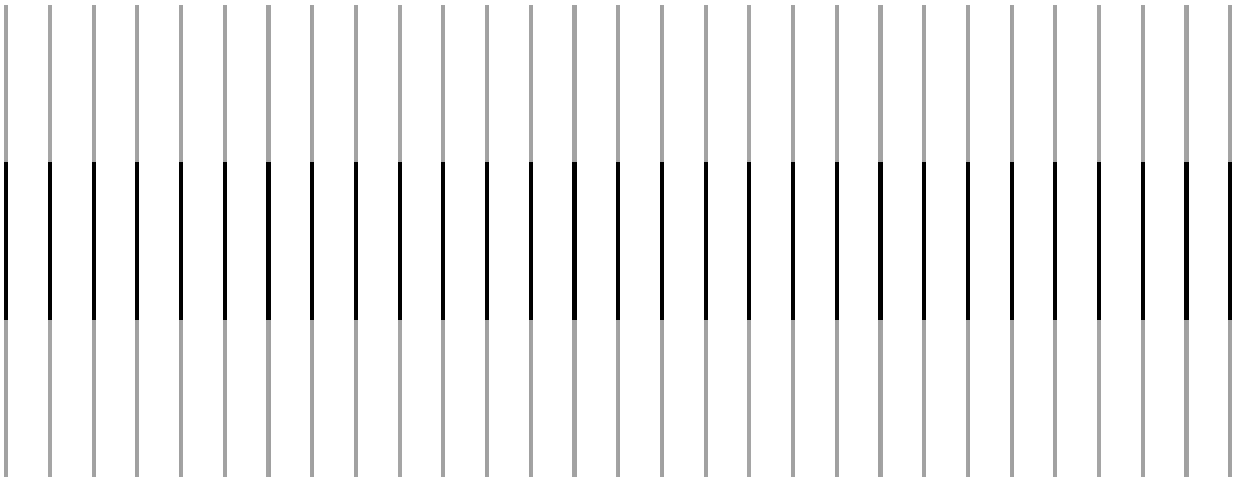
The Smithsonian Magazine claims that To Kill a Mockingbird is hardly a marketer's or publicist's dream. What do you think this implies? Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

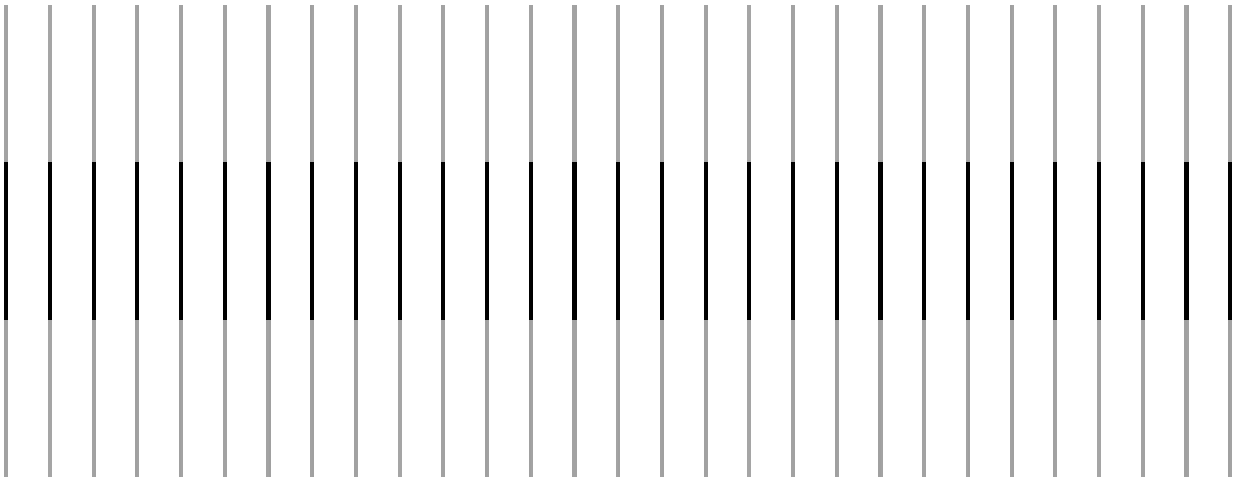




question 26

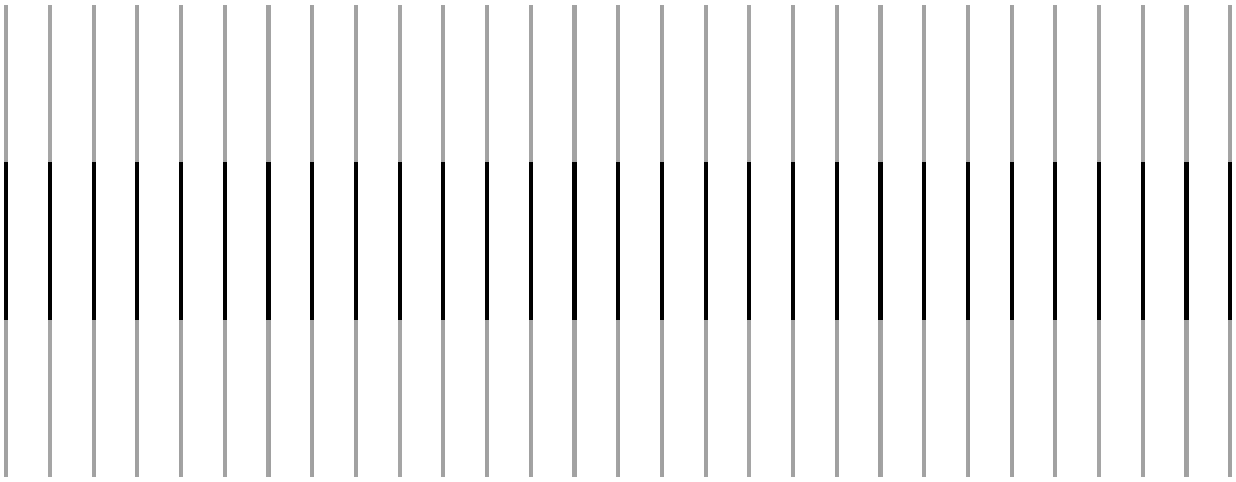
Lee’s mother suffered from bipolar disorder, which resulted in an emotional absence in the lives of her children. Do you think this is why none of the characters in Lee’s book have a mother, including Scout? Why or why not?

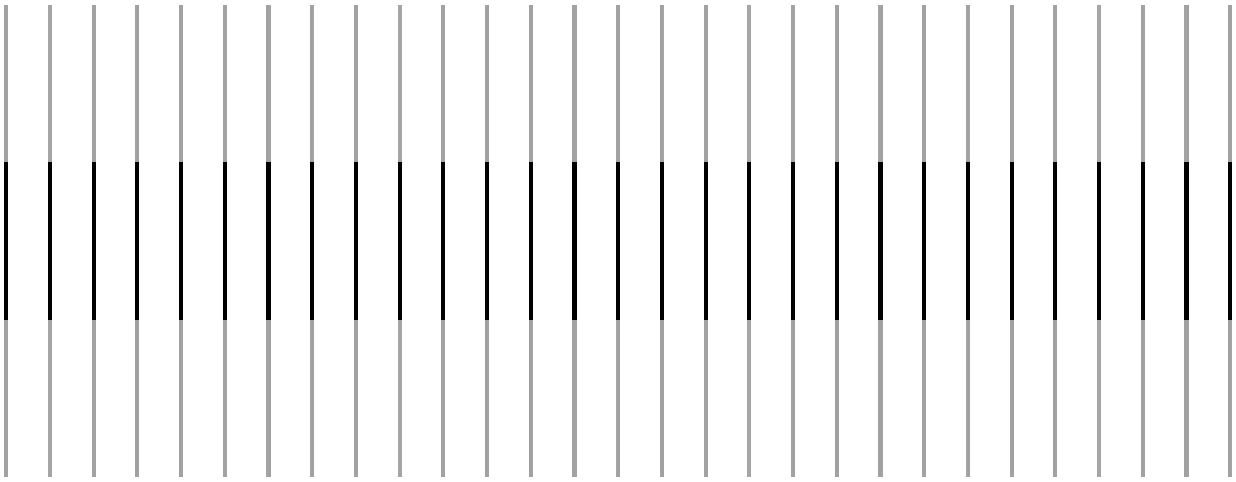




question 27

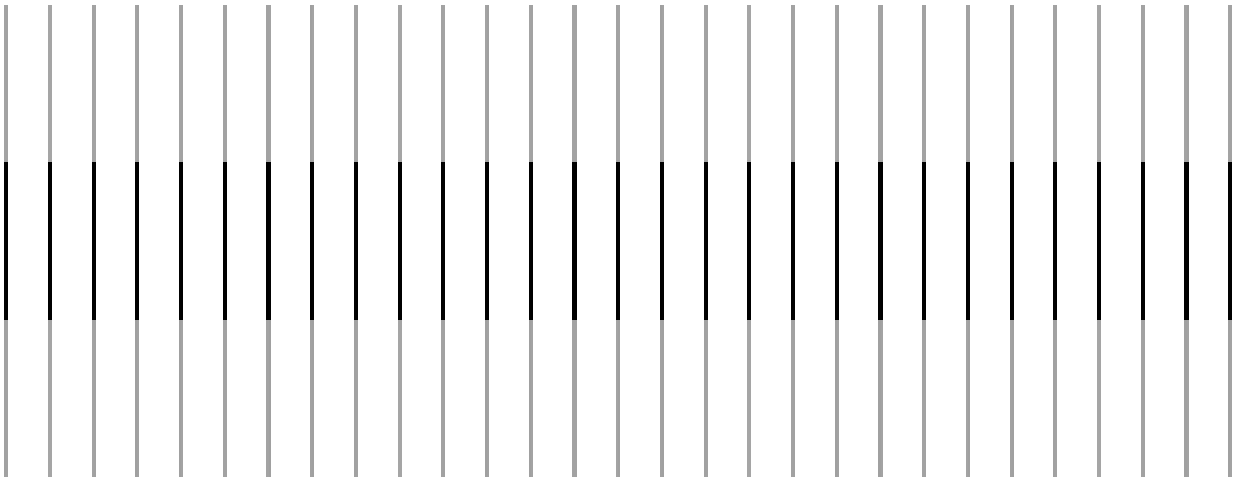
Lee has confessed that parts of the book are autobiographical. However, she preferred not to answer the questions about which parts were based on her own life experiences. Which characters and scenes do you think are taken from real life by Lee?

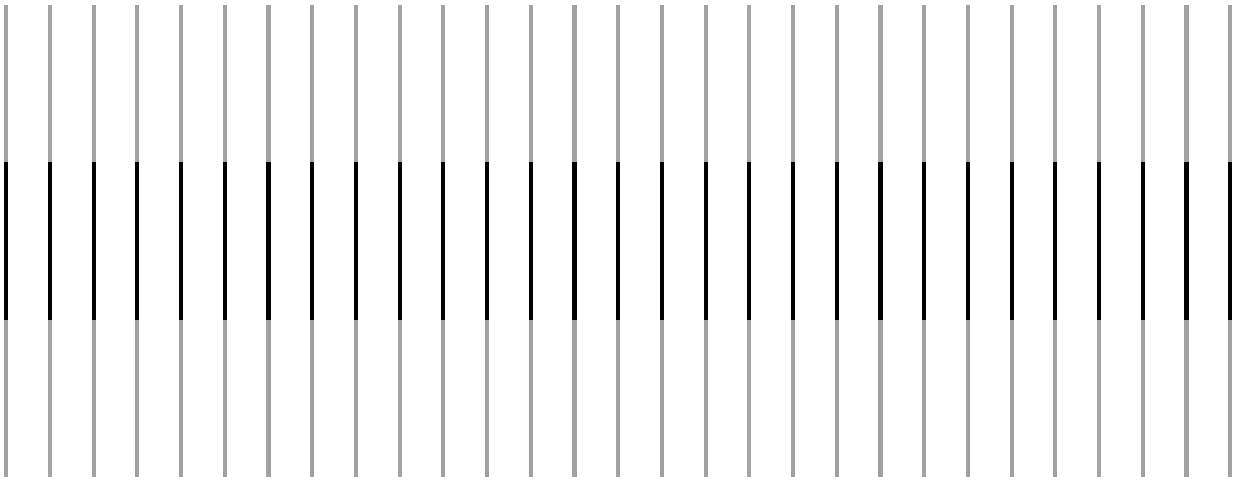




question 28

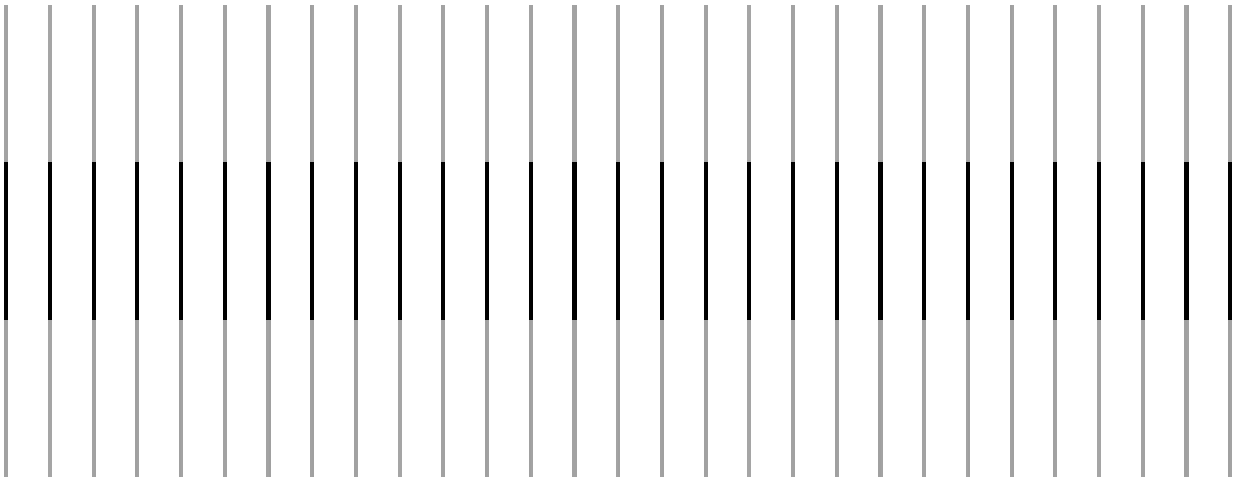
Harper Lee did not approve of the industry that had risen in Monroeville that sold souvenirs to visitors in her name. She won a lawsuit against the museum as well. Why do you think she disliked the use of her name so much?

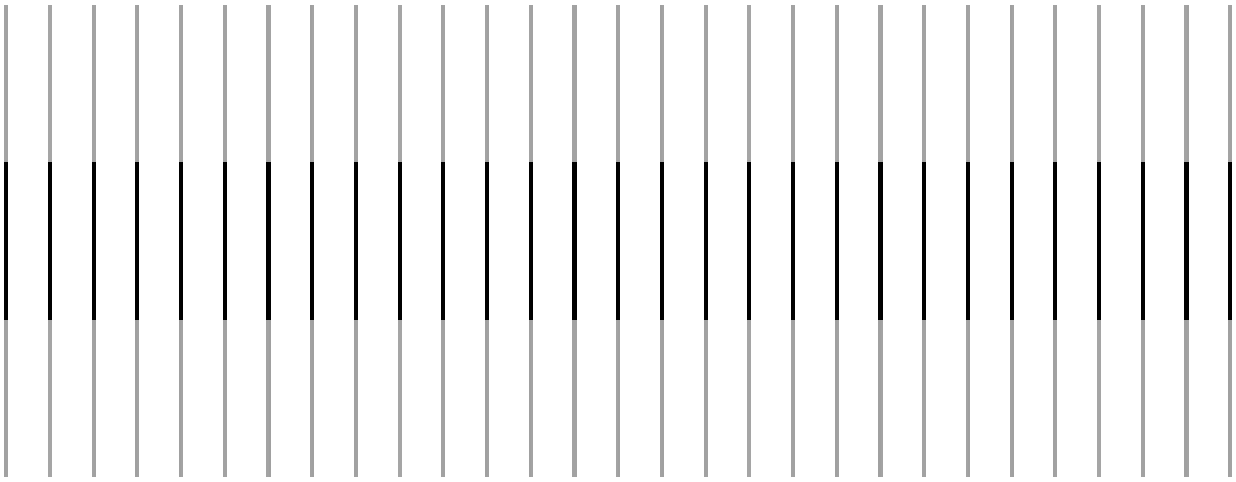




question 29

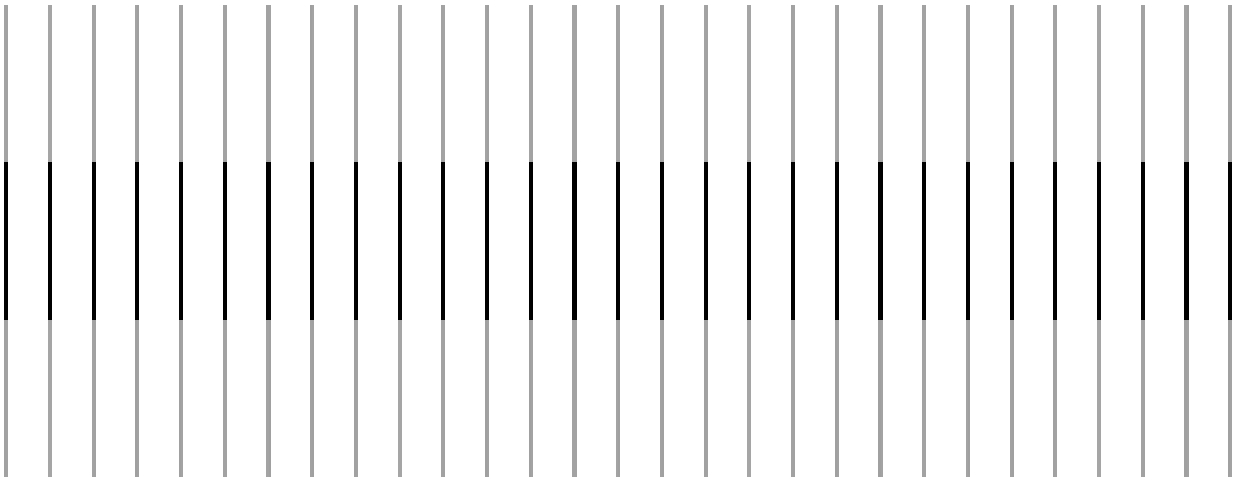
Lee kept away from the limelight and preferred not to give interviews after the initial euphoria of the book’s success passed. Why do you think she declined to speak up for the causes she cared for, considering she wrote a book about a social issue?

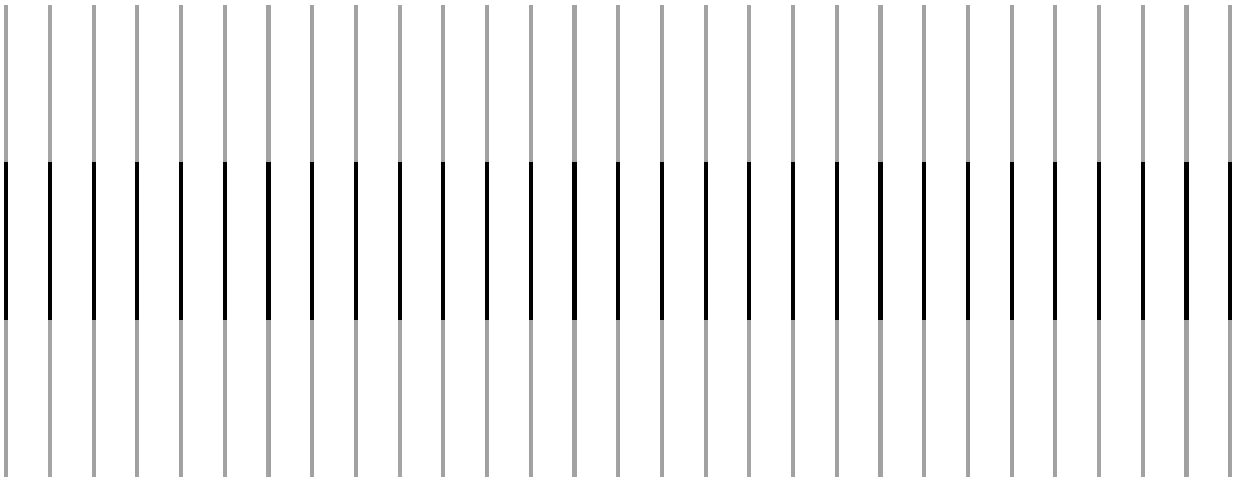




question 30

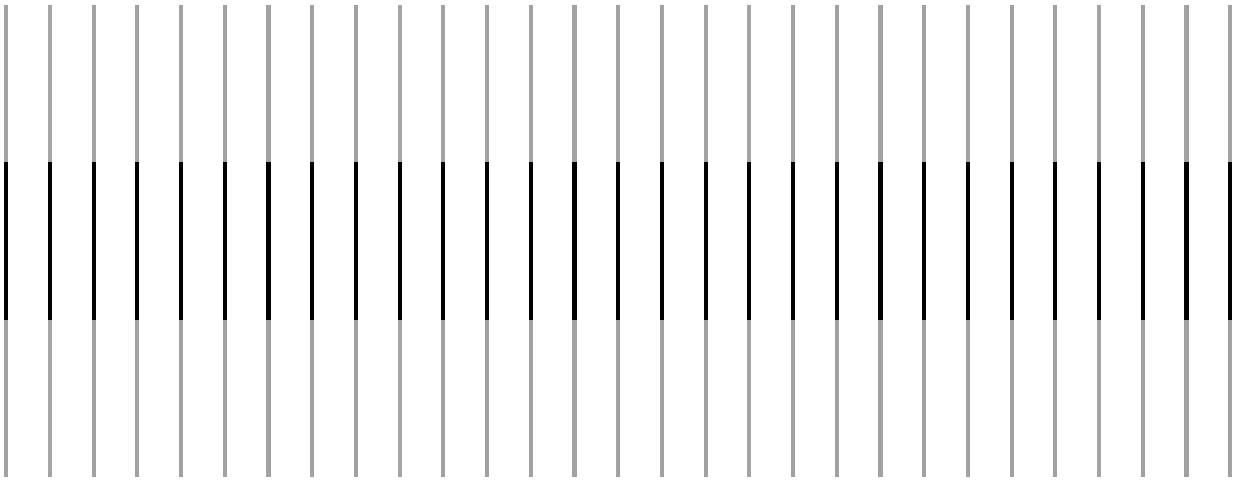
Lee only wrote the one book, and never wrote anything again, though the first draft of this book was published in 2015 under the name Go Set a Watchman. Why do you think this should be so?

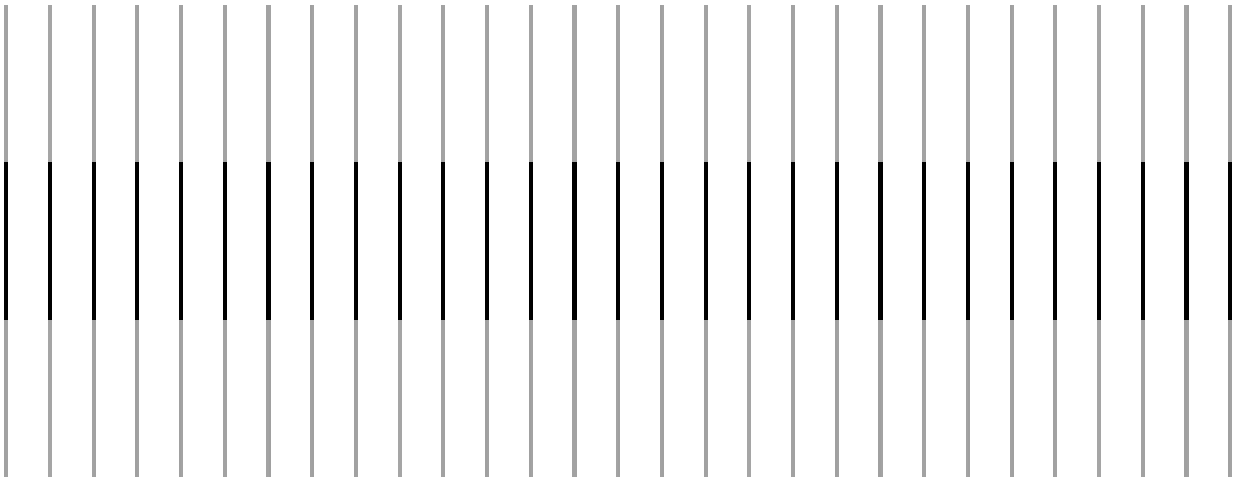




question 31

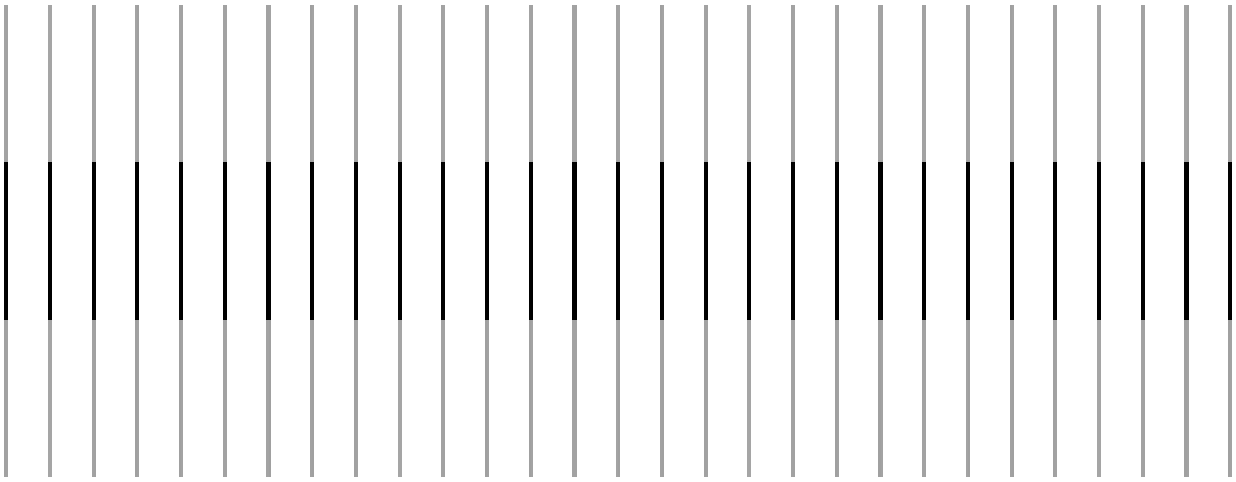
Scout, Jem, and Dill were endlessly fascinated by their neighbor, Boo Radley. But there were far more interesting characters around. If you were in their place, which one would you have chosen to speculate about?

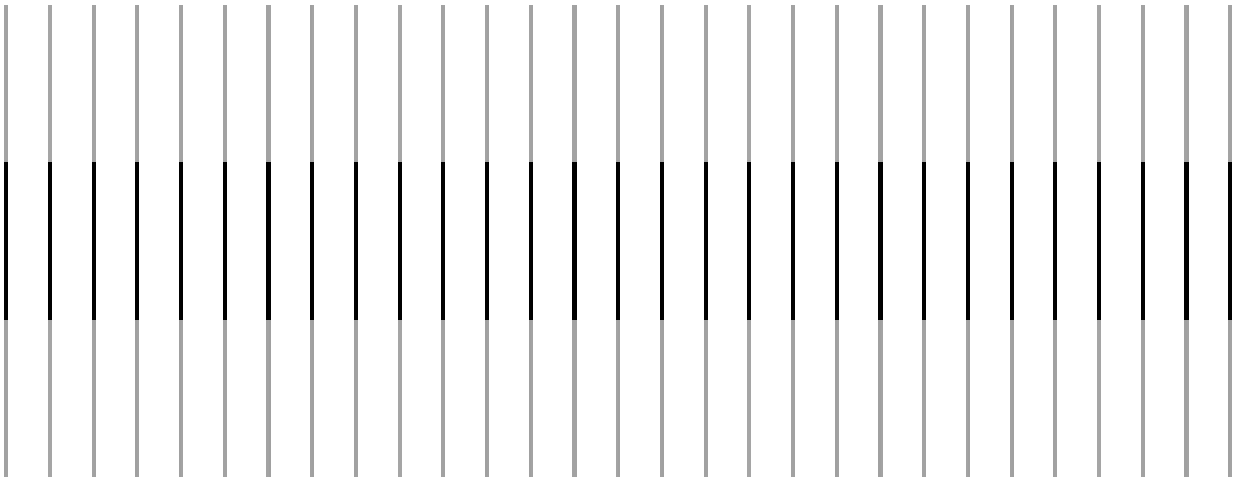




question 32

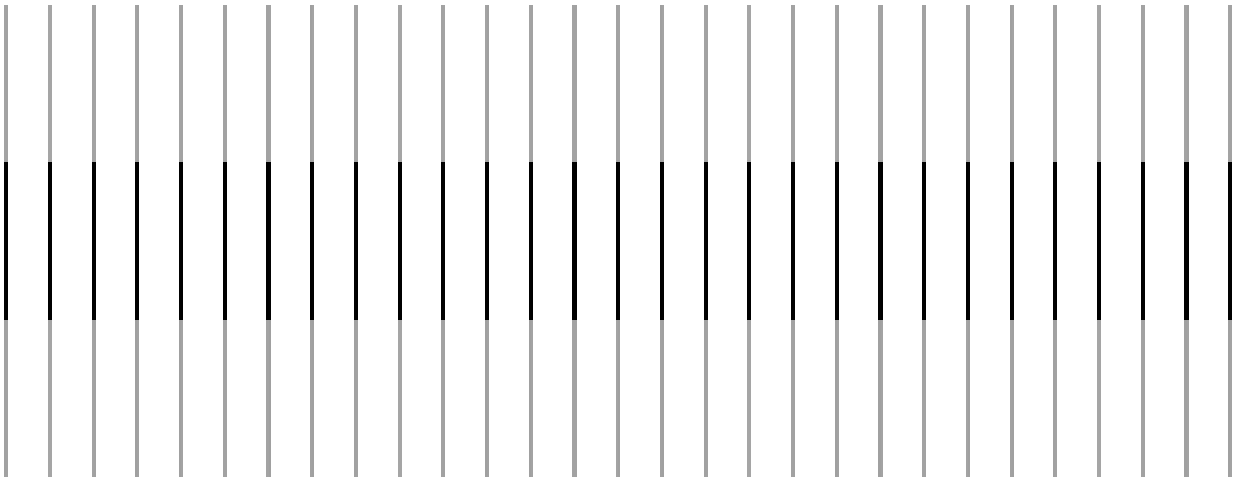
Jem was punished by his father for retaliating to the racial slurs of their neighbor, Mrs. Dubose. He was told to read to the woman as long as she wanted him to do so. If you had been Atticus, would you have allowed your son near a racist or punished him for reacting to insulting remarks? Why, or why not?

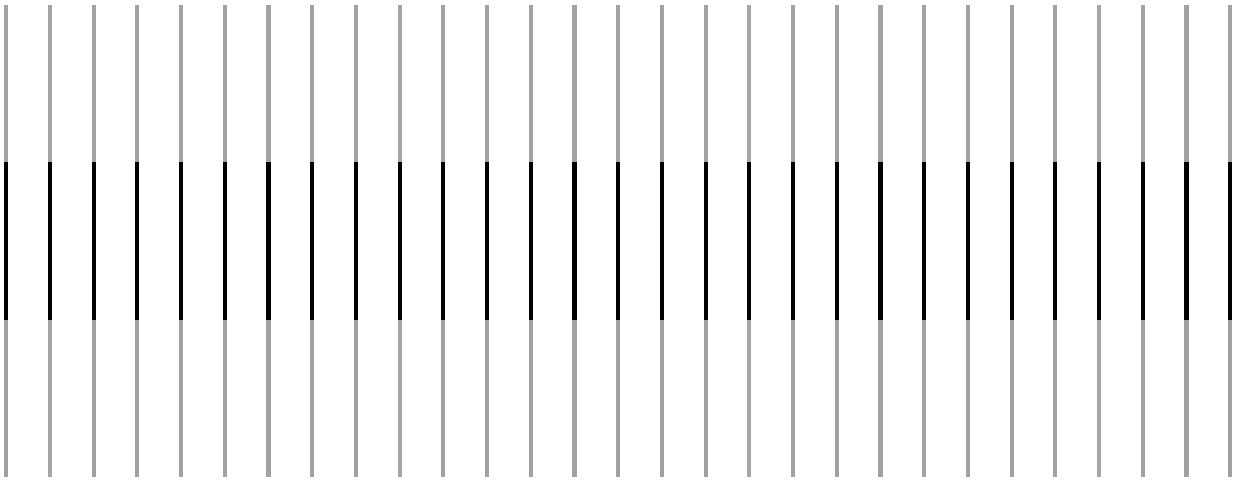




question 33

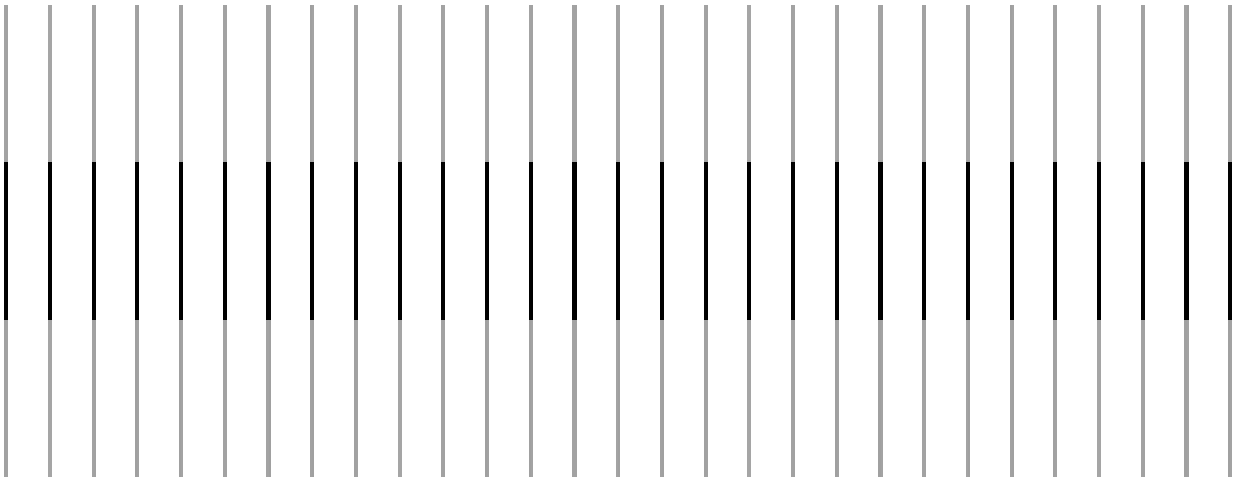
Atticus Finch chose to represent Tom Robinson, even at the risk of his own neighbors and community turning against him, some of them even becoming violent. If you were in Finch’s place, what would you have done?

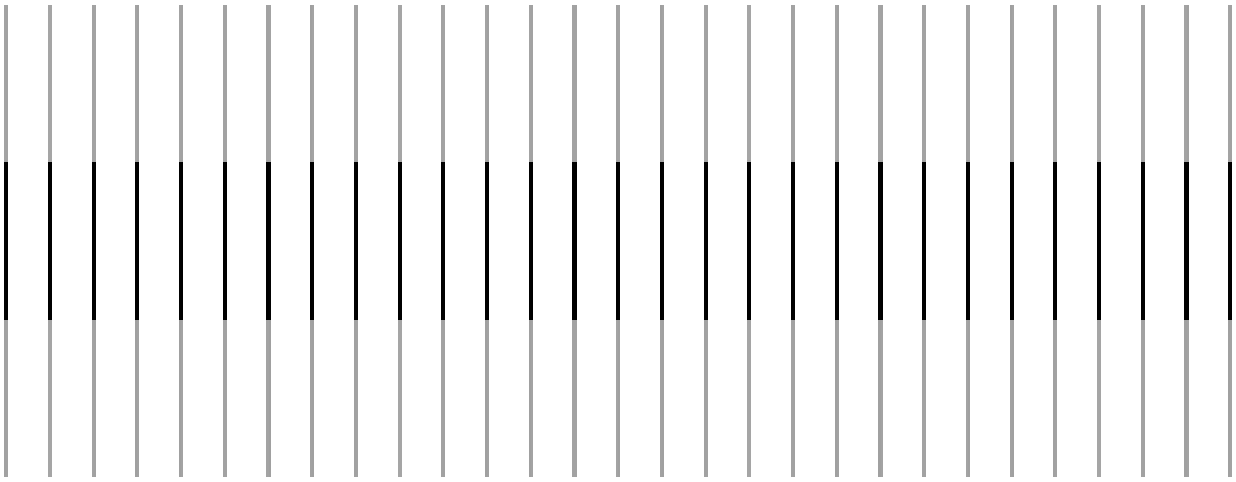




question 34

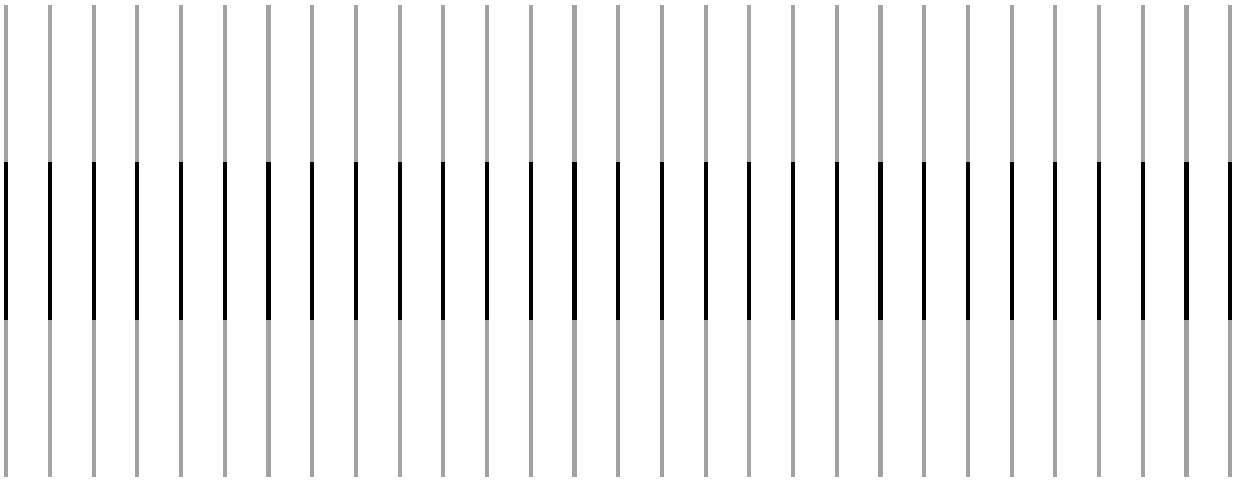
Mayella Ewell was scared of her father and went along with the rape charge on Tom Robinson, even though she was the one who seduced him. If you were in Mayella’s situation, what would you have done? Would you have told the truth? Why or why not?

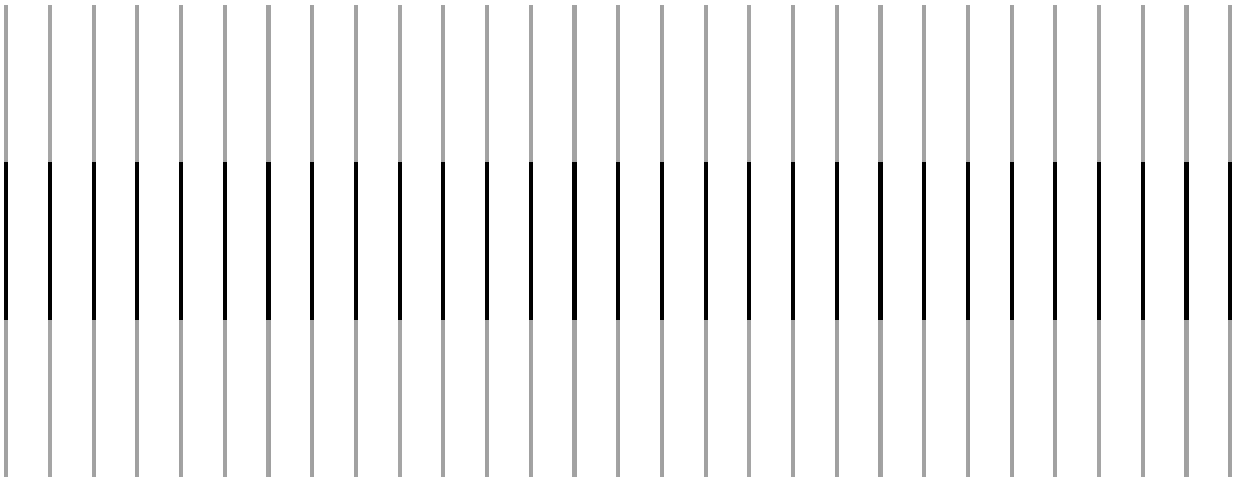




question 35

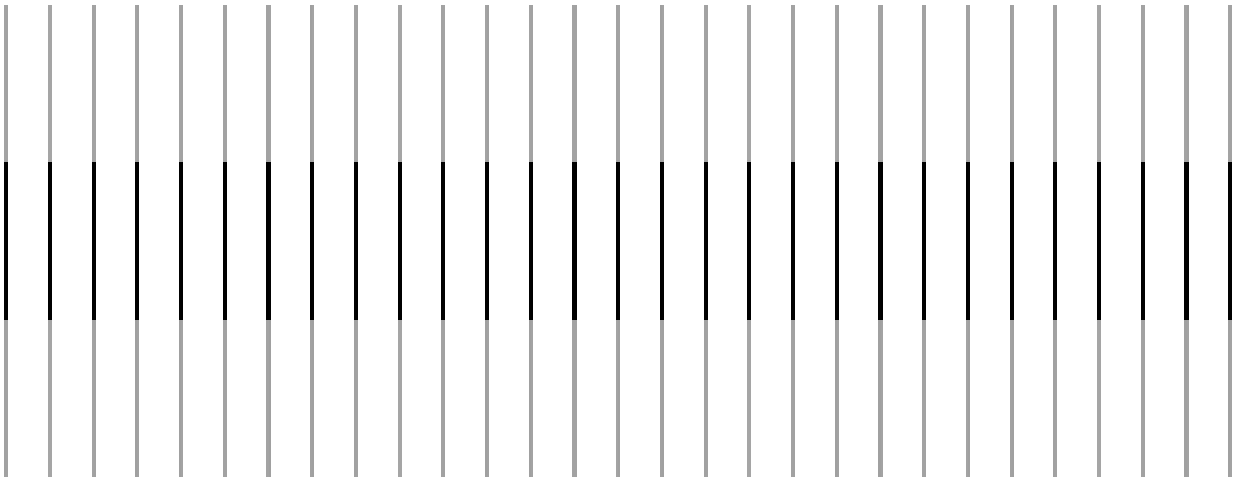
Tom Robinson tries to escape after his conviction, in spite of Finch telling him there was a good chance of his appeal being successful. He is gunned down during the attempt. If you were in Tom’s place, what action would you have taken given the choices? Why?

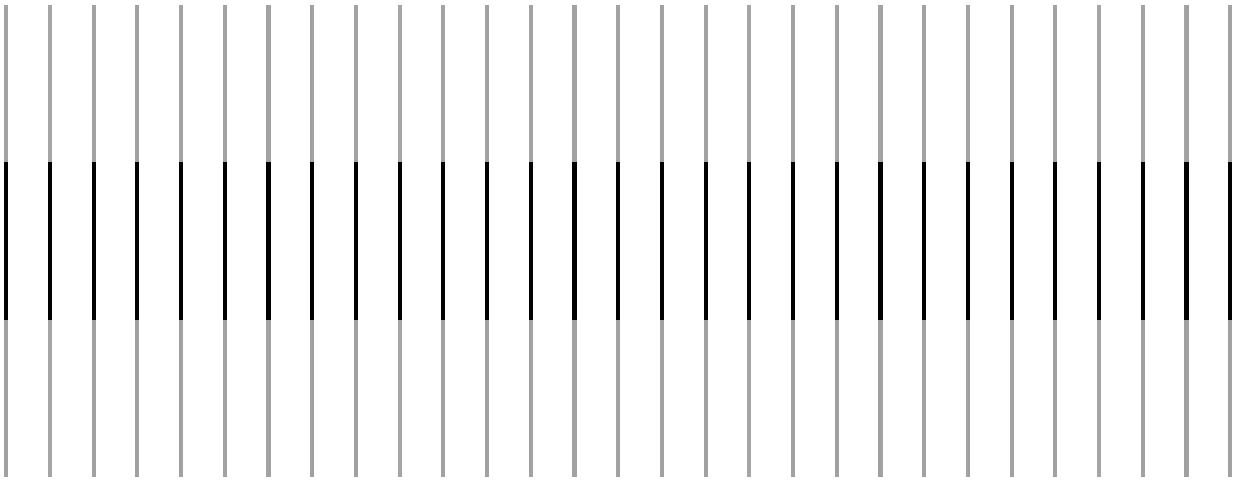




question 36

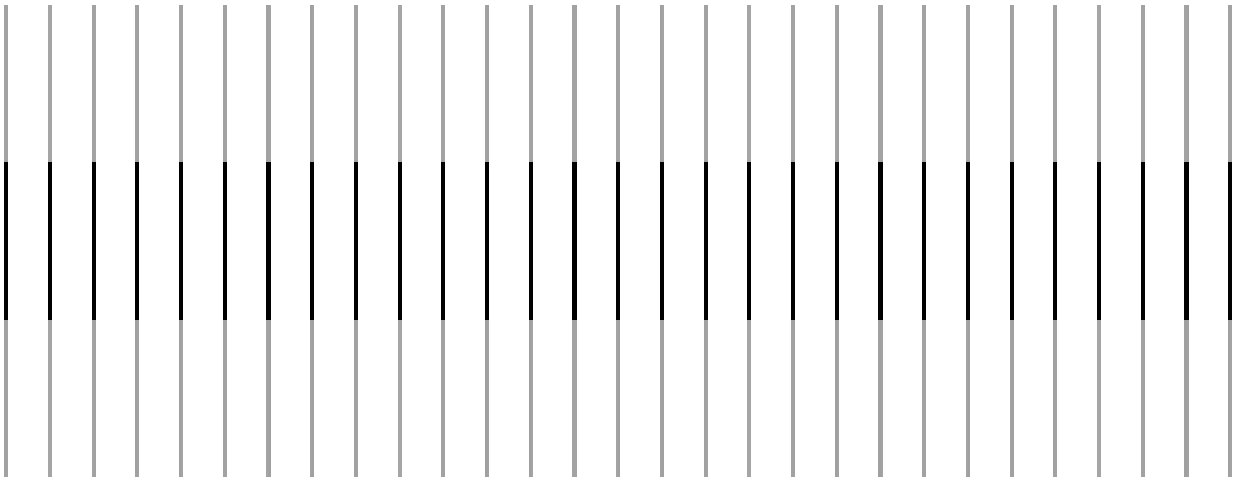
The events are told as seen through the eyes of a very young white girl. Do you think the story might have been different if told through the eyes of an adult or a black person? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

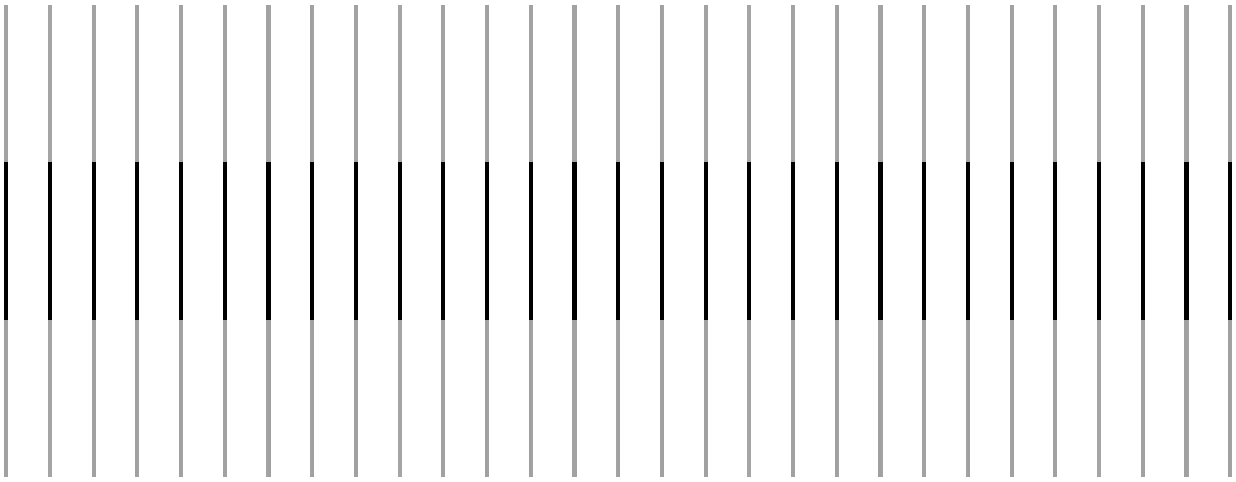




question 37

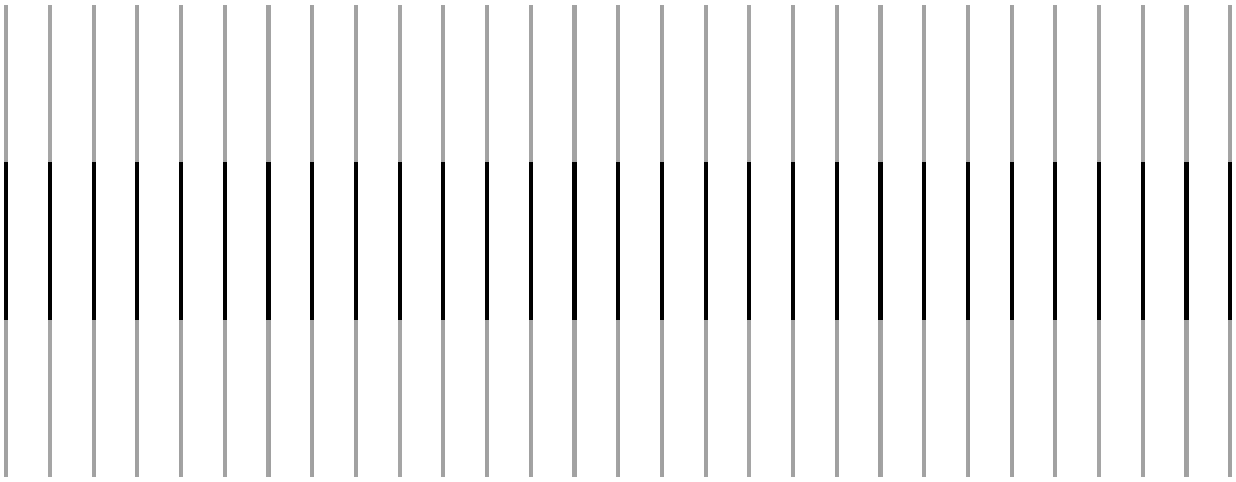
Calpurnia looked after Scout and Jem, and the children felt close to her. If Scout’s mother had been alive, what relationship would Scout have shared with Calpurnia, if any?



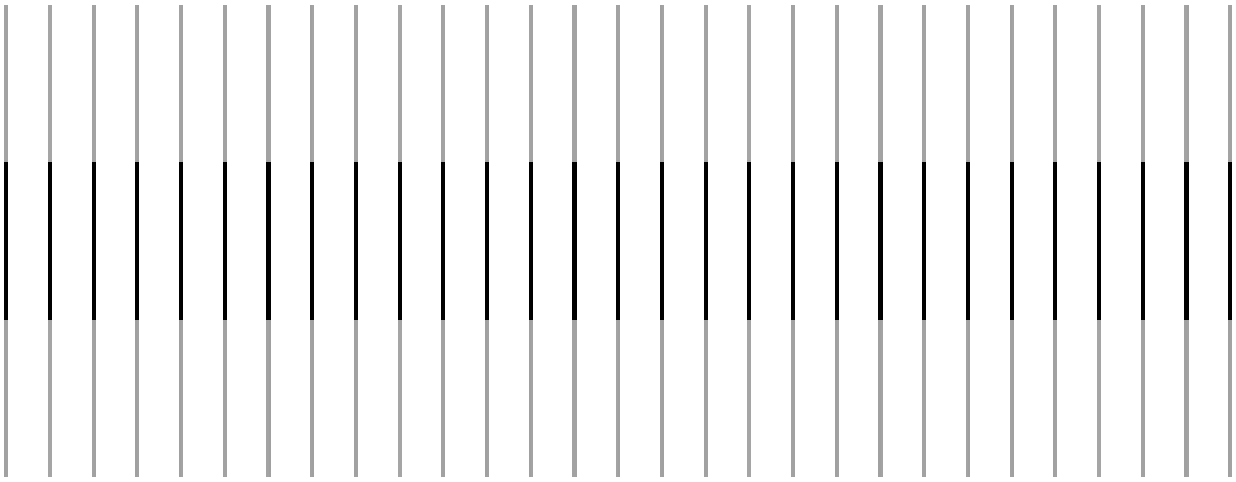


question 38

Boo Radley killed Ewell in order to protect the children. He was not charged with the crime. If a black person had done the same thing, do you think the result might have been different? Why or why not?

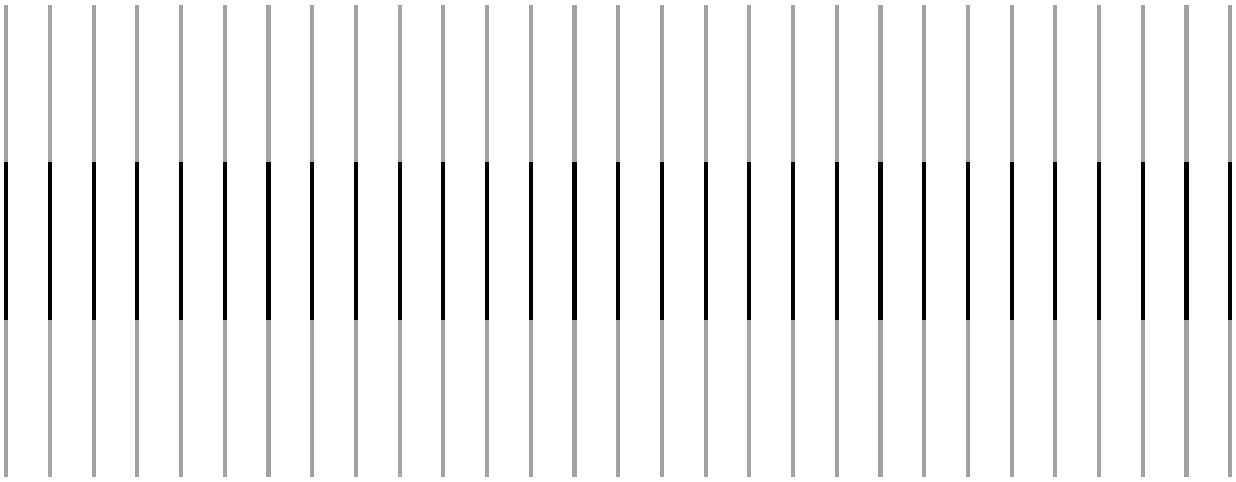


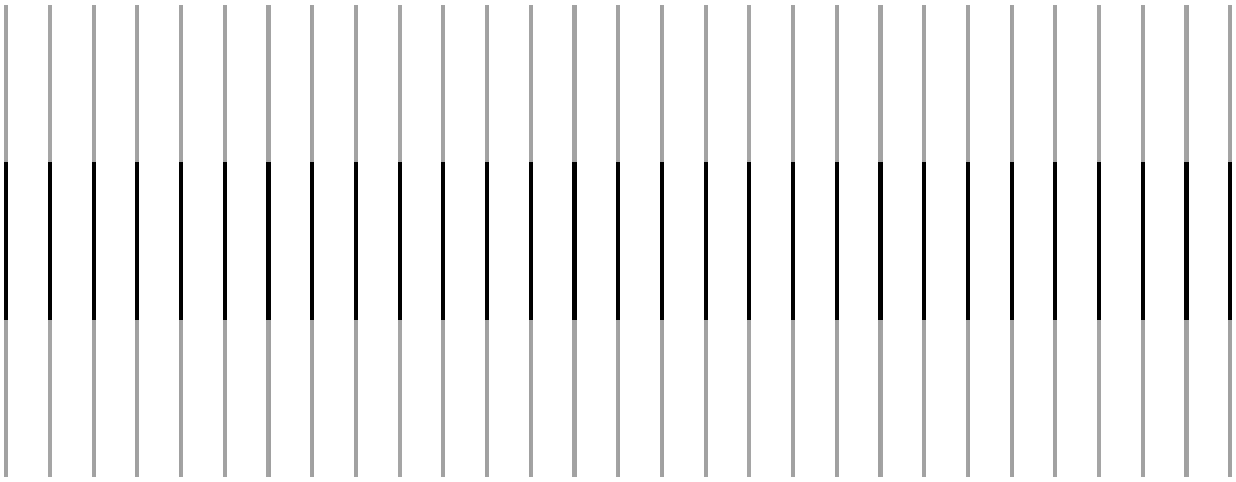
Quiz Questions



question 39

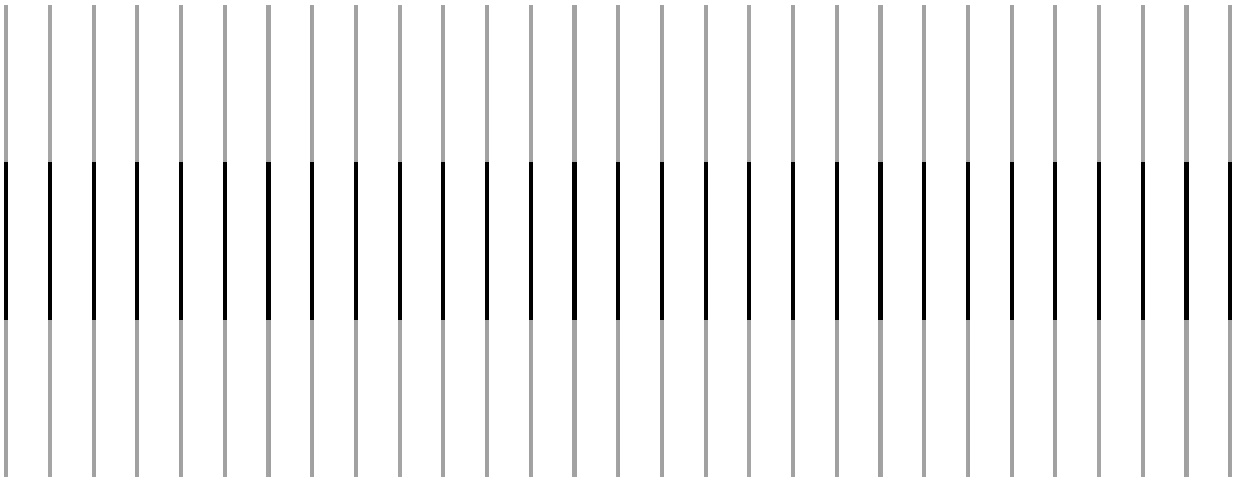
_____ looked after Scout and Jem while their father was at work.

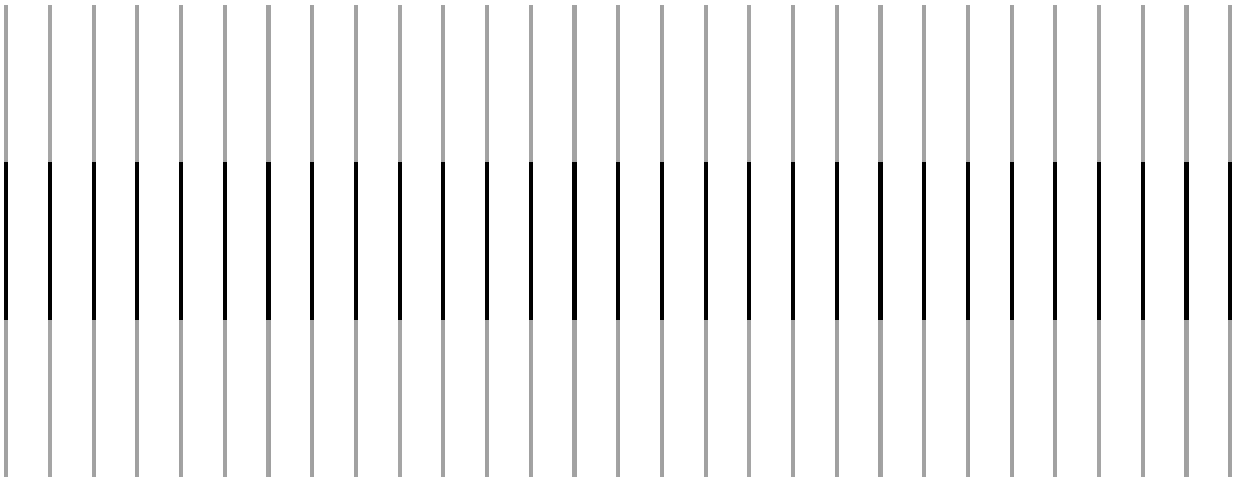




question 40

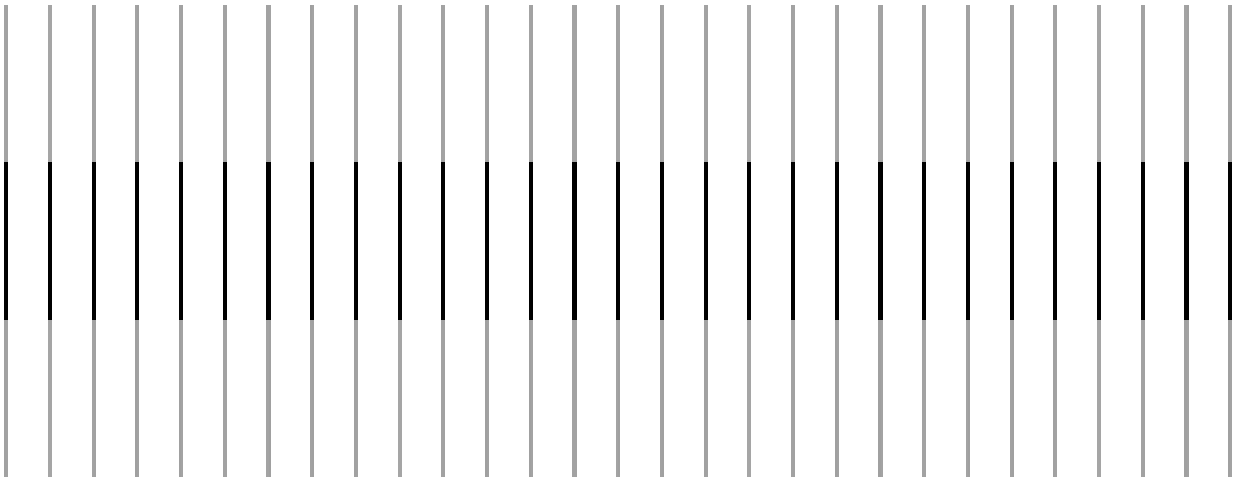
The children were fascinated with their neighbor, _____.

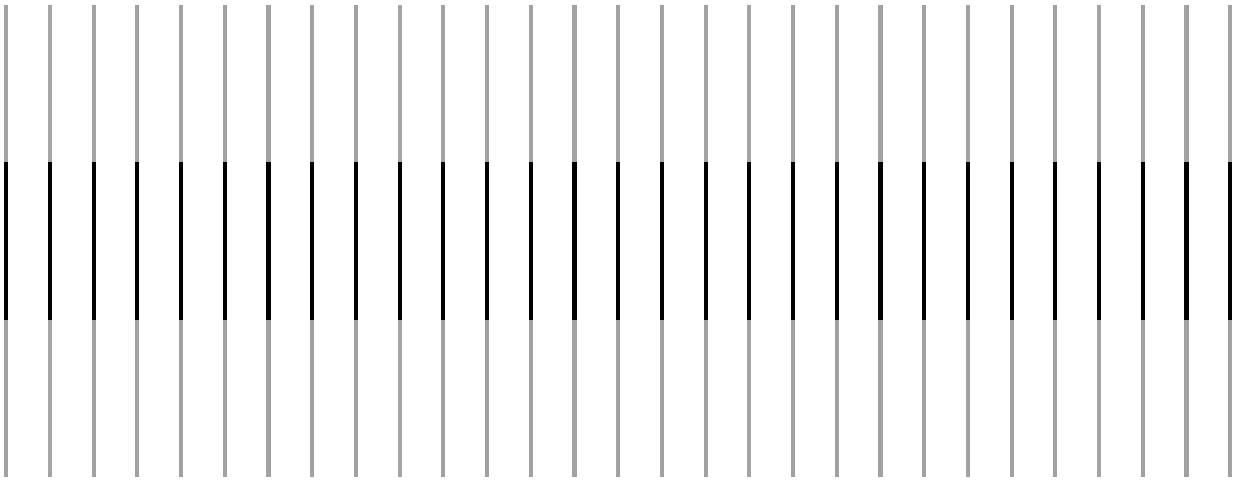




question 41

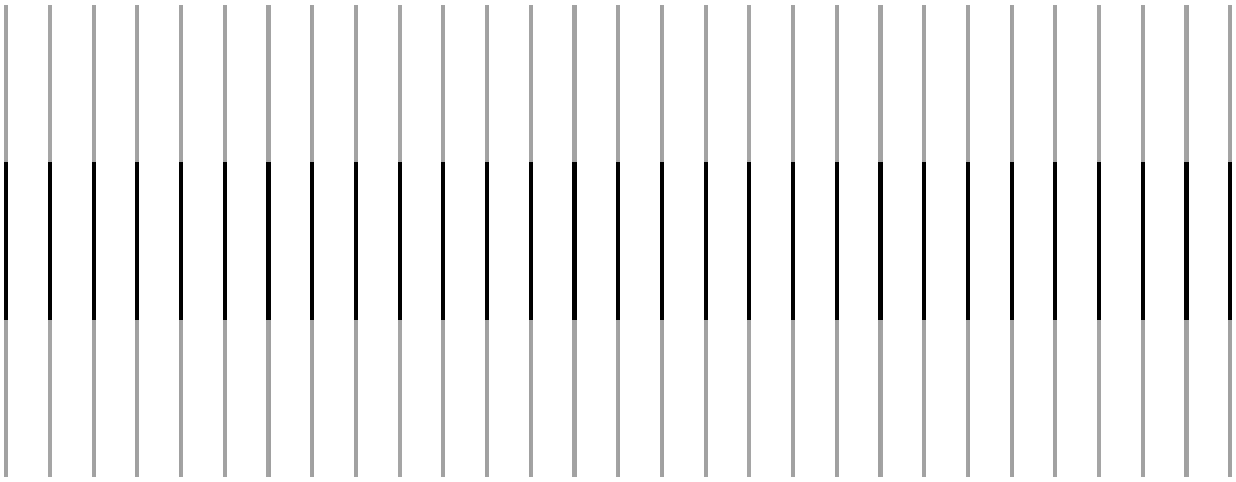
Scout and Jem played with _____ every summer.

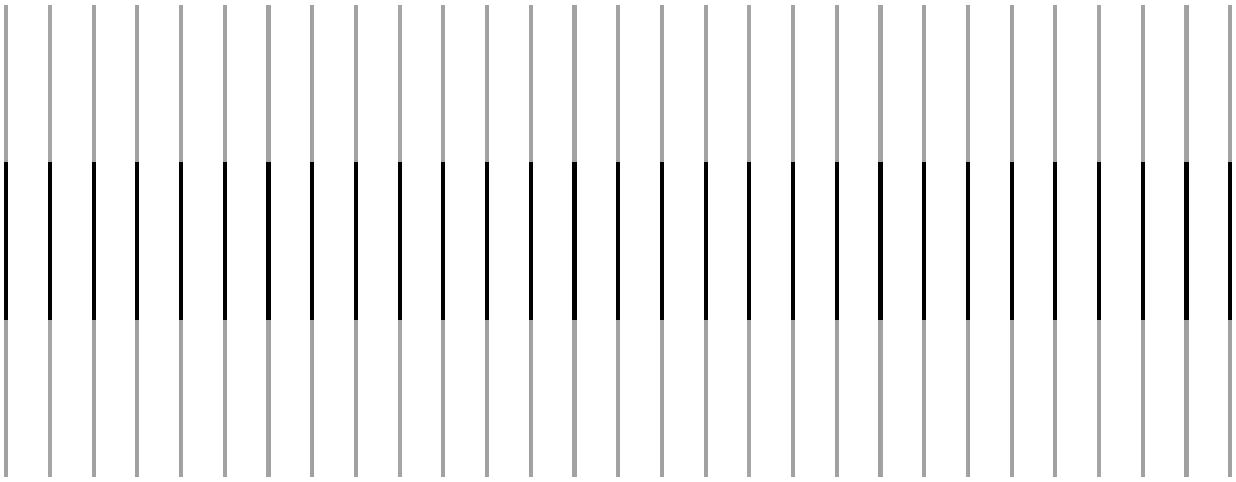




question 42

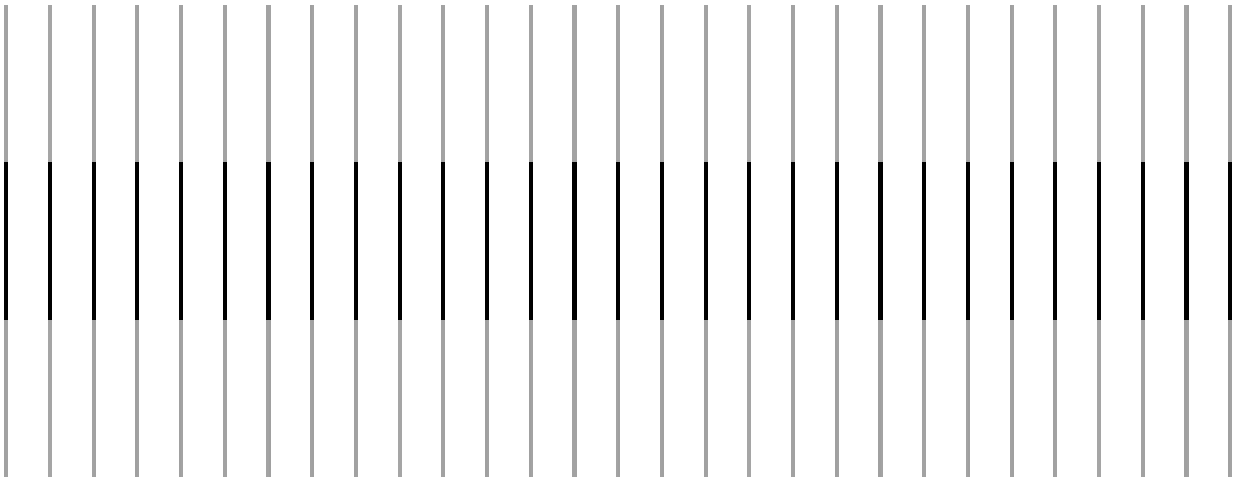
True or False: To Kill a Mockingbird is a novel about racism and sexism.

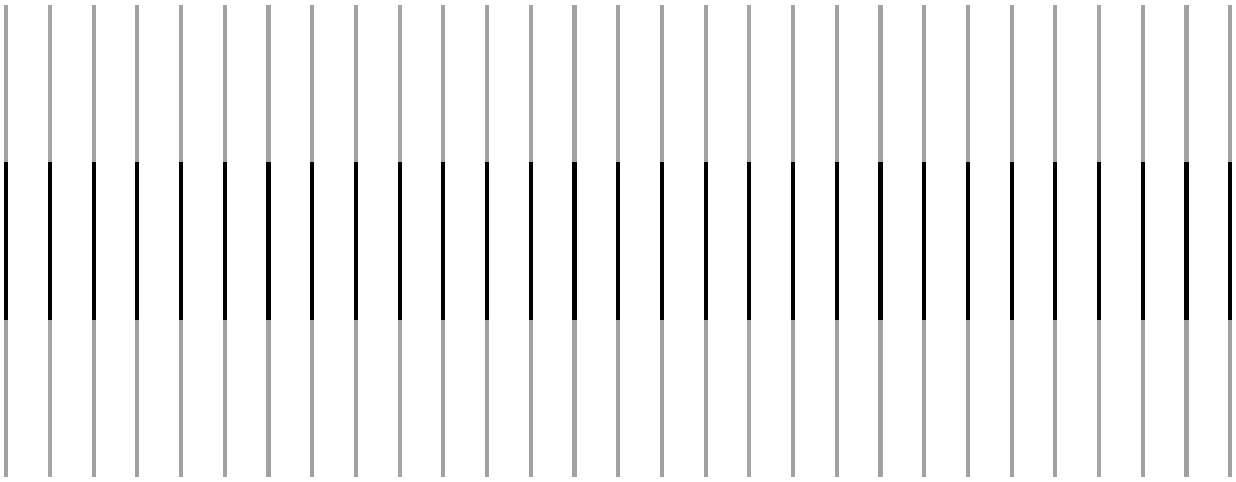




question 43

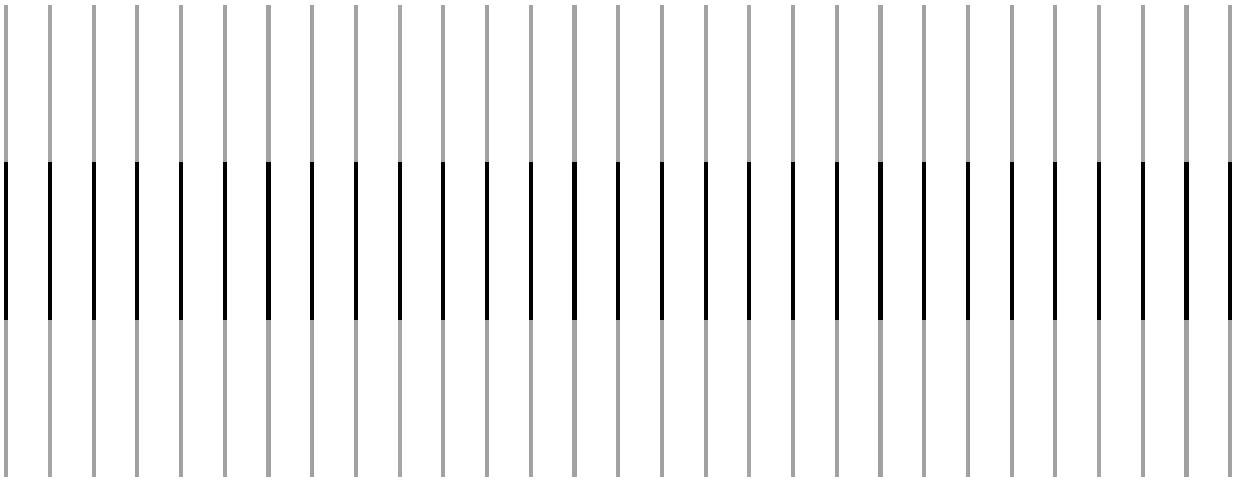
_____ lived with a black woman.

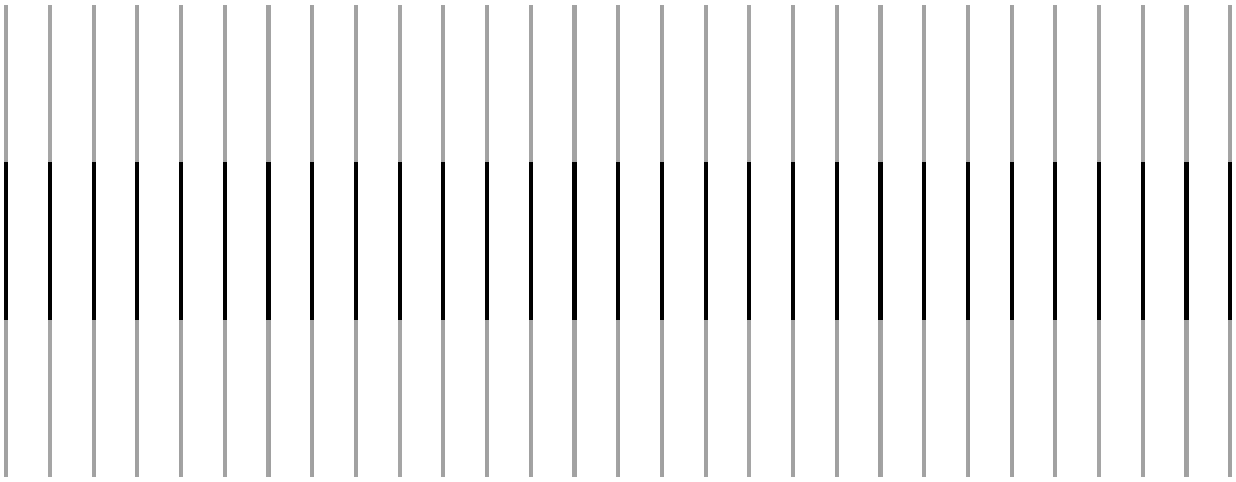




question 44

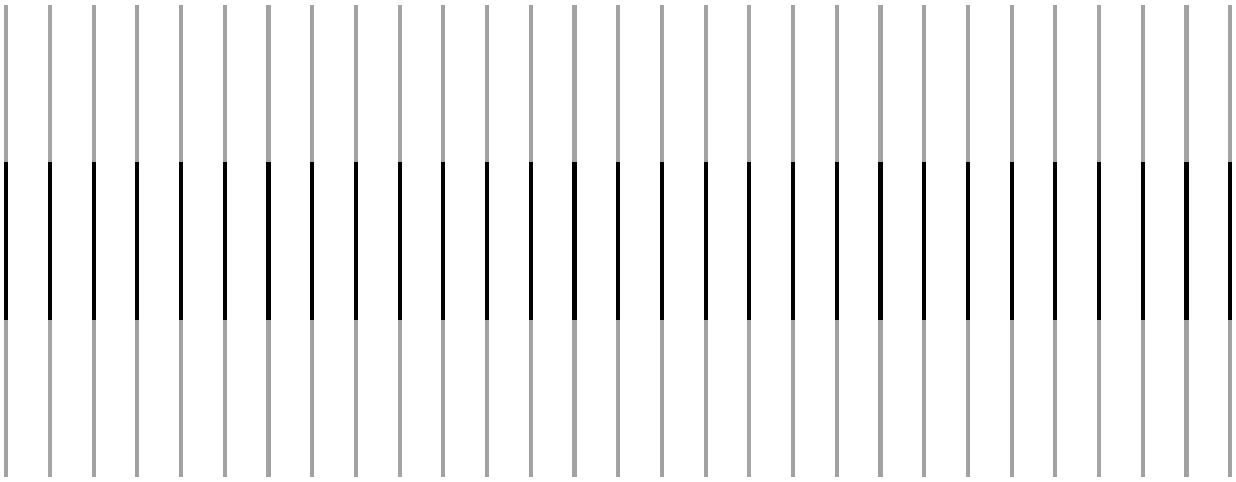
Atticus Finch defended _____.

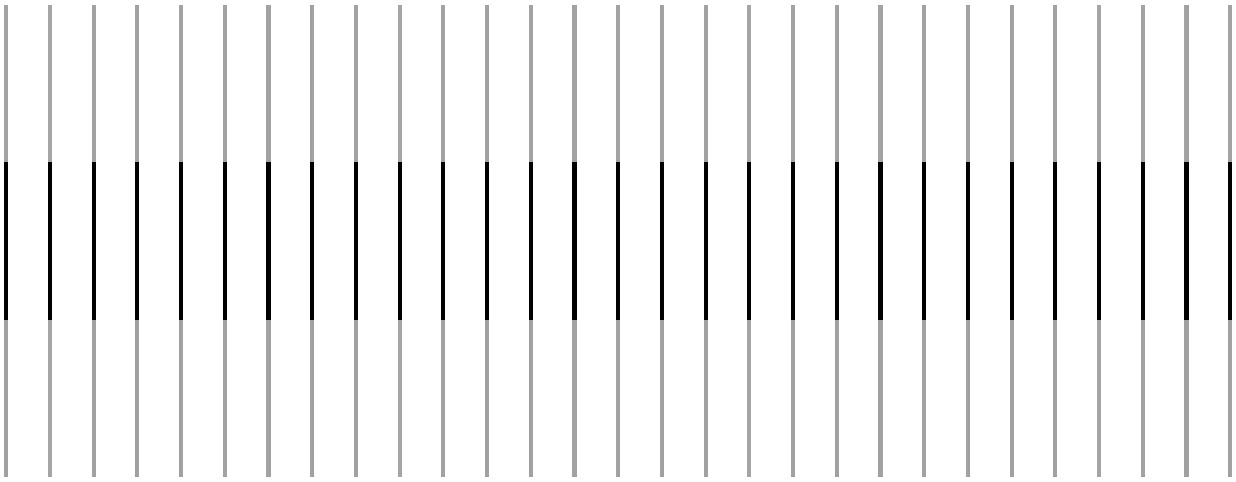




question 45

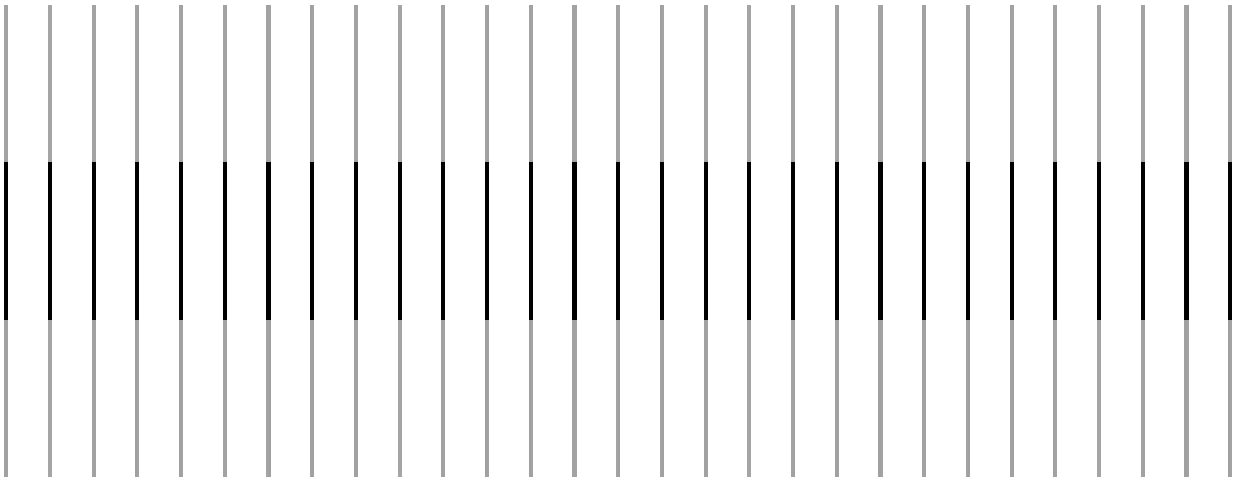
_____ tried to make Scout into a Southern belle.

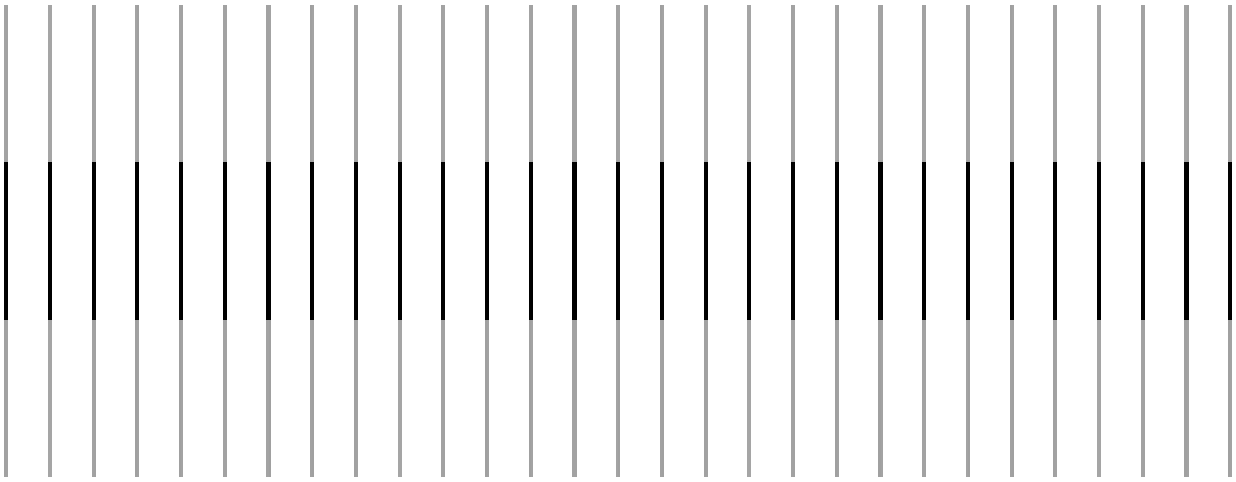




question 46

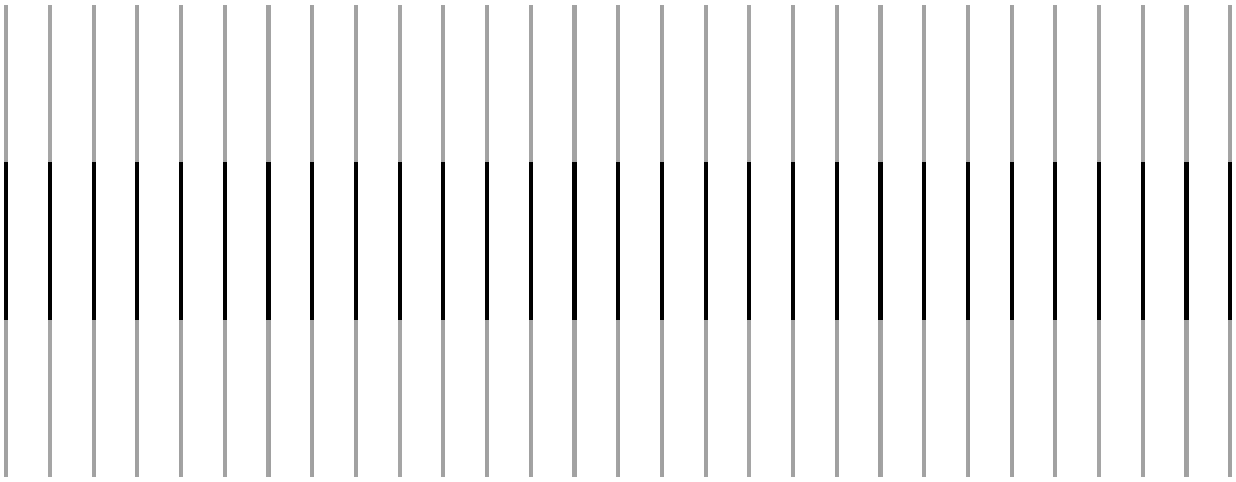
Harper Lee wrote _____ book(s).

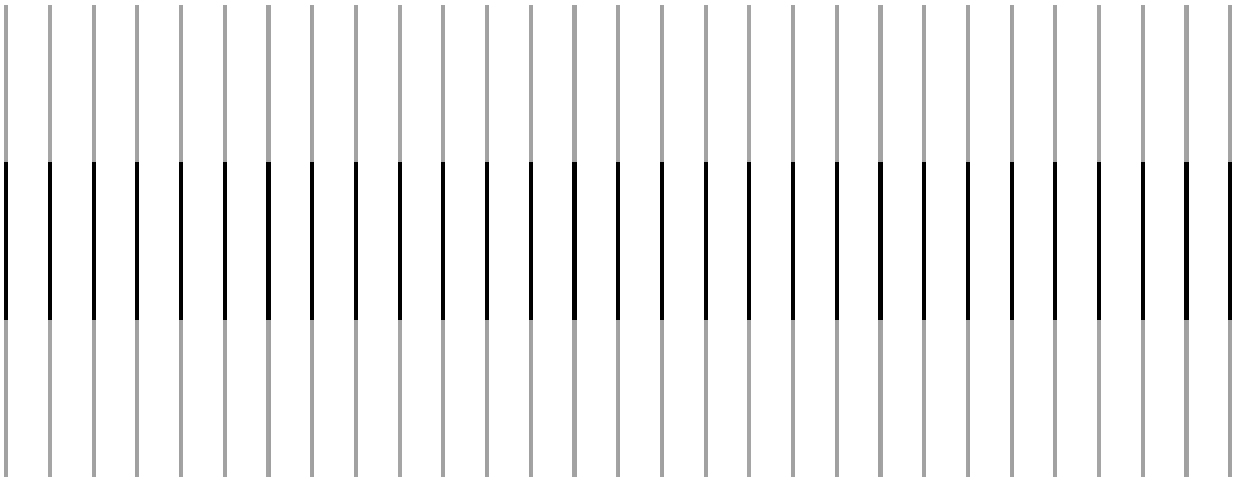




question 47

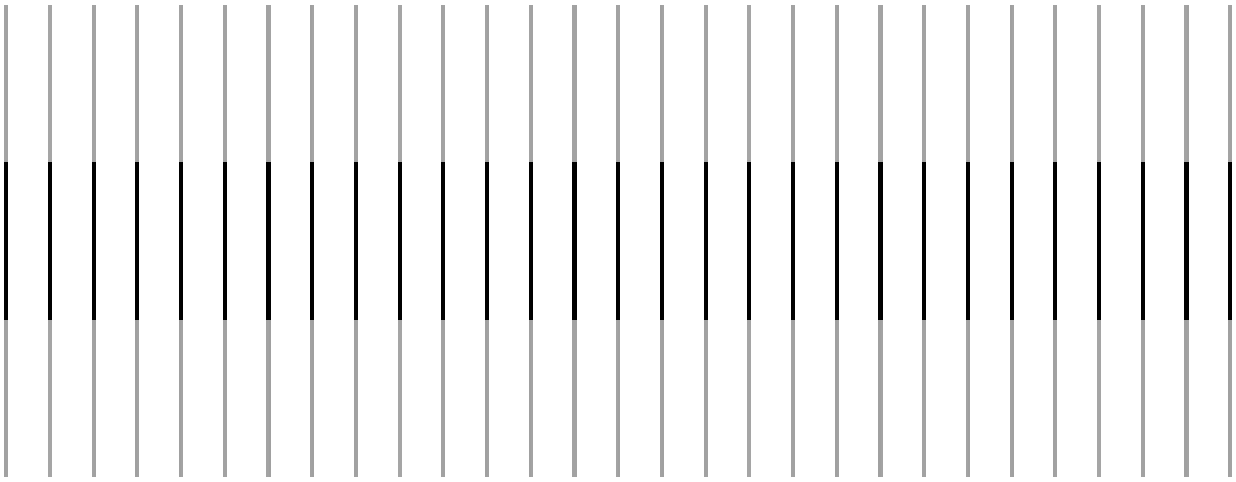
Lee’s given name is _____.

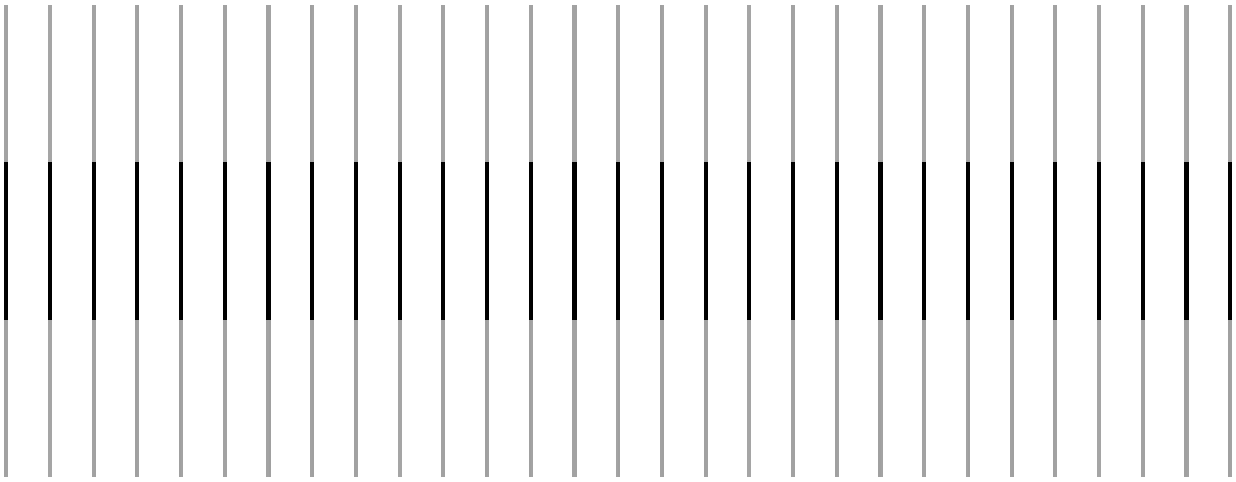




question 48

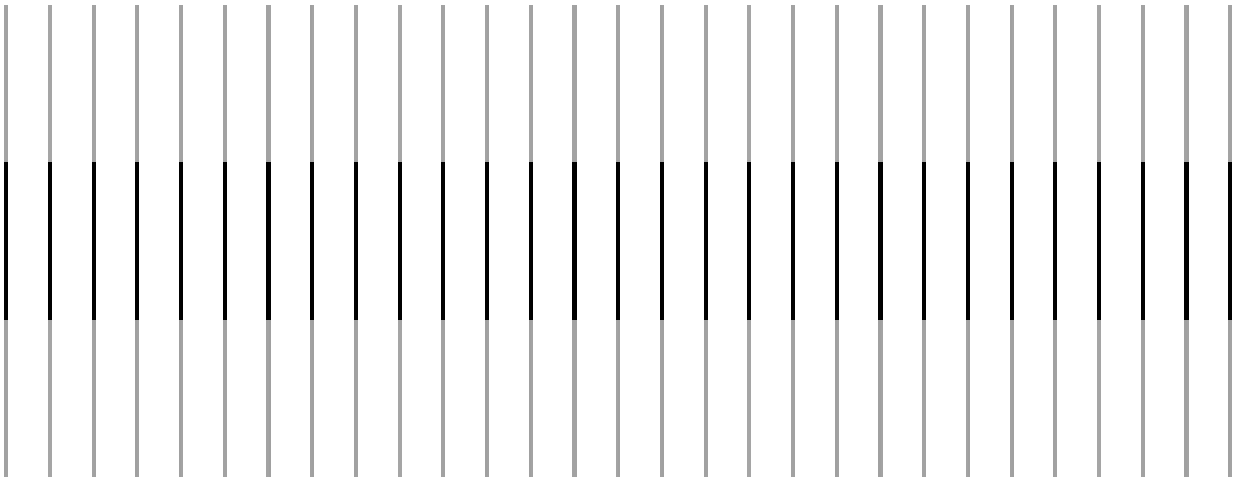
Lee studied for a _____ degree.

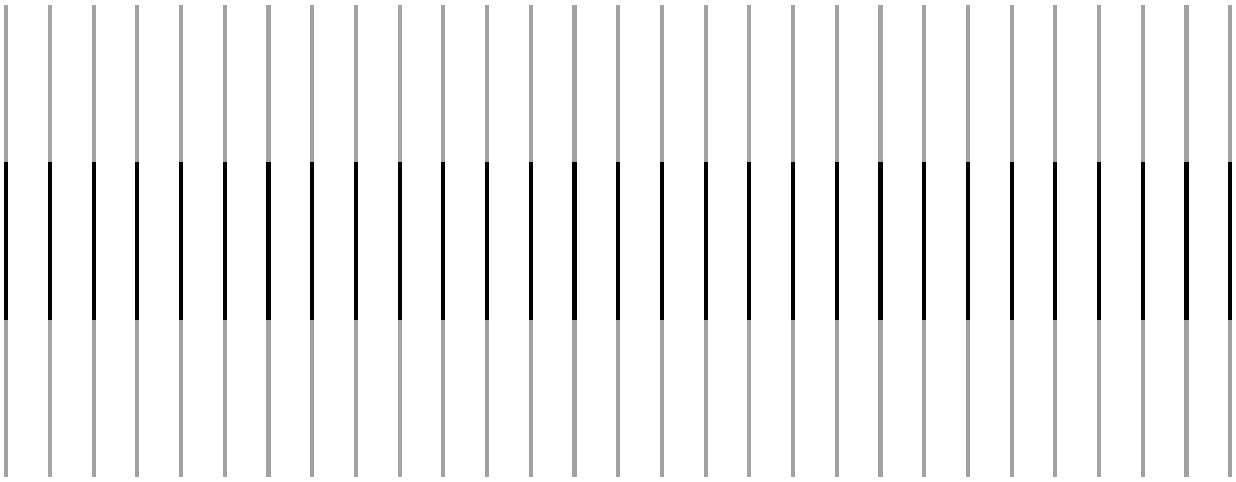




question 49

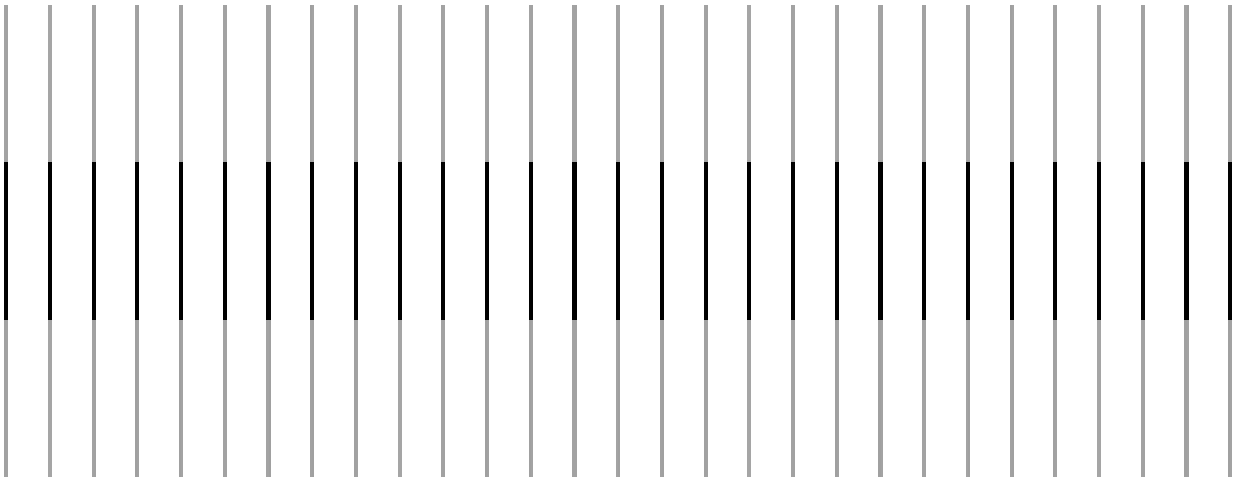
Lee’s friends, _____, gifted her with one year’s living expenses so that she could write.





question 50

Lee won the _____ for her book. Name one award.



Quiz Answers

Calpurnia.

Boo Radley.

Dill.

True

Dolphus Raymond

Tom Robinson

Aunt Alexandra

One

Nelle

Law

Michael Brown and Joy Williams

Pulitzer Prize

THE END

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